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SPARKS FROM THE FIRE

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SPARKS FROM THE FIRE

A VOLUME OF ESSAYS

BY

GILBERT THOMAS

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TO
A. ST. JOHN ADCOCK

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Foreword

WE have tamed and harnessed the fire in the grate ; but it still retains something of its elemental nature. It cannot wholly be conquered, and sometimes—now in a mood of merry exuberance, and now in one of angry defiance—it shows its primeval spirit by throwing out sparks. It is even so with the fire that burns in the mind and heart of a man—the fire of his being ; the fire that is himself. This fire may be tamed by convention, and its energy perforce applied to the dull business of the daily round. But, though it may burn for weeks or months together with a docile and steady flame, it will now and then reassert, if only fitfully, its independence. It will throw out sparks.

This little volume has been written spontaneously at intervals during several years of journalistic task-work. Its pages are sparks from a fire normally subdued and harnessed

to routine. In the course of much literary labour undertaken of necessity and moulded to prescribed patterns, the following essays, and the verses intersprinkled, have been flung off without premeditation or effort, sometimes in a mood of irresponsible pleasure, at other times in rebellion against the cramping tyranny of things. They have leapt out of the fire at random. Some of them, by happy chance, have fallen upon the pages of *The Fortnightly Review*, *The London Quarterly Review*, *The Observer*, *The Bookman*, *The Challenge*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Daily Chronicle*, *The Daily Herald*, *The Daily News*, *The Friend*, *The New Leader*, *The Venturer*, and *The Weekly Westminster Gazette*. To the editors of these journals the author desires to make the usual acknowledgments.

Anne

Anne

MANY people, having bartered away their own youth, are awkward in the presence of children, and when introduced to a baby the only words they can summon to their aid are : “ Oh ! the darling ; how old did you say it is ? ” When such enquiry is made about Anne we reply that her age is seventeen months. So, legally speaking, it is ; you may find evidence of the fact in Somerset House. But where legal truths accumulate (as they do at Somerset House) spiritual lies abound. Spiritually speaking, of course, Anne is both younger and older than her seventeen months. She is so young that those great grey-blue eyes of hers, peering from underneath her golden curls, catch sometimes the light of distant days yet unborn ; while at other times they look so ineffably old and wise that one is sure they have watched through untold centuries the tortuous pro-

gress of man. The fact is, indeed, that Anne is as old as the race itself, and as young ; and within her Past, Present and Future are already pressing their separate claims, and are meeting for peace or for battle. That is what makes Anne so interesting, though her mother will tell you it is just " her pretty ways."

At present Anne spends most of her waking life in scrambling about the room, holding animated conversations (in a language to which we Olympians have unfortunately lost the key) now with a pair of slippers under the sofa, now with the contents of the wastepaper basket which she carefully sifts and distributes all over the floor, and now with herself seen through the glass of the Globe-Wernicke bookcases. Of this occupation she never tires, till she grows heavy with sleep ; nor, fortunately for her, do the slippers or the wastepaper basket or the bookcases resent her unflagging attentions. Often she pauses for a moment to call to our notice some particularly thrilling object that she has discovered, or to bid us enjoy with her a specially good joke, or to bring us some token of good fellowship—a remnant, it may be, of last week's *Observer*,

or the shattered limb of a doll, or one of the best antimacassars. She cannot walk yet, except for an occasional staggering step or two ; but that fact does not impede her rapid locomotion. She can crawl at the rate of at least half a mile an hour, and by clutching at any supports available (as, for instance, a table or a chair or one's own person arrayed in a new and neatly creased suit of clothes) she attains at times an even more dangerous speed. Now and then, without any warning, there falls upon her activity a complete stillness. If you look at Anne then you will see that she has gone into a deep trance. To what remote islands in space or time or eternity her mind sails in such moments it is impossible to conjecture. That they are very pleasant islands, however, is suggested by the fact that she usually returns from such voyages into the silence with a sudden ecstasy of joy that shakes convulsively the whole of her sturdy young body, as a jolly gale shakes a tree.

Anne has just discovered a new delight that will hold, I think, a permanent place in her heart. It happened that I was reading a book. It was on the subject of National Finance.

Anne spotted me and demanded to be set down beside me. There for some long while she sat, holding one of the covers of the book, and quietly reading it with me. Her face wreathed itself in smiles, and when it occurred to me to read aloud to her, following the lines the while with my finger, her joy overflowed. Later in the day she brought that same book to me of her own accord and herself proceeded to read it aloud ; and now to share a book in this way is for her (and for her uncle) an unfailing joy. I do not pretend that she has learnt much from the book about National Finance. I am not sure for that matter that I have learnt much about it myself. But what of that ? And what if Anne and I can interpret each other's spoken words hardly more clearly than she can comprehend the printed page ? At least we understand the language that heart speaks to heart when something is being spontaneously shared by two people without patronage on either side. To share things spontaneously with others without patronage given or desired : that indeed is one of Anne's deepest instincts. Of such as keep that instinct unimpaired is the Kingdom of Heaven. How long will Anne

keep it so ? That is the question I often ask myself when I watch her in the presence of strangers.

When a visitor enters the room, Anne instantly ceases to be all arms and legs and wriggling body, and becomes all solemn eyes. She assumes, as it were, the black cap, and, putting the stranger in the dock, holds him to be an undesirable acquaintance until (as usually happens fairly soon) she finds him to be innocent. First, however, he is scrutinised severely from the crown of his head to his footwear. We have never been able fully to decide all the points upon which Anne has to satisfy herself, but those strangers who wear bright clothes or carry jewellery seem to stand a chance of more speedy release from suspicion than others. When Anne is assured that the prisoner may, after all, be acquitted, she signalises the fact by a dramatic thrusting forward of her right hand in his direction ; and then, by way of setting her seal to the verdict, she selects from the objects within her reach one that she thinks would appeal to this particular stranger and carries it to him. If to a very dignified business magnate or to a scholarly high-

browed gentleman with spectacles she takes the naked celluloid boy who shares her bath twice daily, or offers to a lady with light gloves a small piece of coal surreptitiously seized from the scuttle, one must not judge her too harshly. Her standards are different from ours.

It is when the gift has thus been tendered to the visitor and accepted that I tremble for Anne. There are many people who cannot appreciate a flower growing with unconscious beauty in its proper setting ; they must needs pluck it. And there are even more people who cannot leave a child to its free and natural play. Our visitor—unless he be one of those hopeless creatures who are frozen senseless when confronted with children—will almost certainly seize Anne, and, with many terms of endearment upon his hollow lips, set her upon his knee. So far, it is true, no very great harm is done. A gentleman's knee is an excellent vantage ground from which to explore the fascinating recesses of a gentleman's pockets. But, unhappily, the gentleman rarely allows such exploration to proceed unhindered. He almost invariably regards Anne as something

to be petted for his own pleasure in petting, or as something that needs to be "amused." If, for instance, she shows any interest in his watch chain, he ostentatiously produces the watch itself, and begins condescendingly to talk to her in falsetto tones about the "tick-tick." Anne, of course, is thrilled for a moment; but it is only for a moment. If the good gentleman persists in cuddling her and in trying to rivet her attention to the "tick-tick," she grows fractious, and, unless liberated, she will do what she rarely does in any other circumstances—she will cry. For she has the instinct which all normally endowed and unspoiled young creatures possess—the instinct to detect and mistrust whatever is not simple and spontaneous, and to rebel against all that would hamper their free and natural development. The healthier a child is in body and mind the more will it dislike being petted, and the less will it depend for its happiness upon any form of organised amusement. That is why the most intelligent children care comparatively little for toys. Only fools (of whom, alas, there are not a few in this world) would expect a child of seventeen months, who

finds magic in every object that meets its eye, to lose its heart completely to one particular doll or one particular wooden dog. And even when the years increase and the unfolding of individuality brings with it the desire to play games of definite make-believe, the child whose imagination remains keenest will clamour least for toys. The fact that I cannot pass Messrs. Bassett-Lowke's windows in Holborn without stopping for ten minutes to gaze at the expensive and accurate models of railway trains that adorn them, does not prove that I have kept my youth ; it means that in large measure I have lost it. I still want to play at railways, it is true ; but I know that if I am to play at them at all satisfactorily I shall need those perfectly accurate models, whereas if I were still truly young at heart, a match-box would serve quite adequately to represent the Irish Mail or the Grampian Corridor Express. . . .

But Anne calls again for attention. We left her upon the stranger's knee. She sees in that stranger merely someone who is excessively annoying and from whom she desires only to be free. I see in him something more dangerous. For the impulse that makes that amiable

gentleman wish to "amuse" Anne, to whom the whole of her little world is Fairyland so long as she is at liberty to enjoy it and to share it naturally with others, is the same crazy sort of impulse that moves many of the best-intentioned people to interfere in more serious ways with the spontaneous growth of the child. Most men and women take it for granted that an infant needs "amusing" and desires toys because they themselves need amusing and because they themselves are habitually dependent upon toys. For them the large room of life has ceased to be Fairyland; wonder no longer whispers to them from every corner, calling them to adventure; and when imagination is gone there comes the inevitable need for toys. So everywhere we see men and women who have grown crusted in heart playing with their toys—playing with Gold, and calling it Happiness; playing with Learning, and calling it Wisdom; playing with Churches, and calling them Christianity. And these are the people who, tragically unconscious of what they are doing, will seek, as Anne grows older, to teach her also that Pleasure is Joy, that Respectability is Morality, that Success is Life, and that it is

more important to acknowledge with certain forms God the Father and God the Son than it is to be filled with the Holy Ghost.

.

It is now very late at night. It is past six o'clock. Anne has been bathed and put to bed and, after sundry mild acts of rebellion, has fallen asleep, probably to dream, if she dream at all, of what the wastepaper basket may be made to disgorge to-morrow morning. But I, as I lean upon her cot and watch her healthy, unconscious breathing, dream of a rather more distant future. And, as I do so, I pray not that she may never meet difficulty or encounter honest foes, but that she may always remain, as now, instinctively on guard against the seductions of her friends. I pray that she may never be enticed out of Fairyland by patronage or toys.

Mary of Huntingdon

*THE sun had fought, the clouds had won,
The day I came to Huntingdon.
It seemed that Cromwell's spirit there
Pervaded all his native air,
As, waiting for a laggard train,
I sauntered through a sombre lane,
And then, by devious paths, came down
To the old bridge below the town,
Where, by the water, the high mill
Climbs story upon story till
It meets the sky. Yes, Ouse may smile
Sometimes, but nothing could beguile
My leaden heart that day. The air
Was stern and sullen everywhere . . .
Tired at length, I found a seat
Hidden within a green retreat,
And there, with yet an hour to wait,
I sat alone to contemplate
My weariness ; when suddenly
(It seemed from nowhere) came to me*

*A little maid some five years old,
With grey-blue eyes and hair of gold,
And limbs as lithe almost as wings,
And lips that glowed with unsaid things.
She stood and stared at me awhile.
Then she became all one big smile.
And then around the seat she pranced,
And then upon the seat she danced.
Then on the ground she sprawled and crept,
And then into the air she leapt ;
And oh, 'twas well none else could see
Her very shameless coquetry !
I asked this nimble, darling elf
To tell me all about herself.
She pursed her mouth. It was so chary
That it would only venture " Mary."
But oh, her big and rolling eyes
Spoke all the wealth of paradise ;
And, as she smiled, the sunlight won
The day for me at Huntingdon.*

On Passing Through Ipswich

On Passing Through Ipswich

ONE of my ambitions, when I was a boy, was to be the proprietor of a travelling domestic store. In imagination, indeed, I often drove from village to village—my van bulging with brooms and brushes, shining new saucepans, tins of oil, and other requisites for the busy housewives of the countryside. My ambition, alas, has never materialised ; but, some time ago, it came as near to fulfilment as it is ever likely to do.

A friend of mine—a manufacturer whose chimneys, I regret to say, contribute their quota of gloom to the skies of West Ham—asked me to accompany him in his own motor-car on a “ travelling ” expedition for his firm through East Anglia—a “ ground ” that, in commercial parlance, can best be “ covered ” by that method, owing to the erratic railway system by which the district is served. I warmly embraced the invitation, not only because the journey offered

something of the romance that filled my youthful dream, but because, save for Cambridge and the Broads and the Fens—for which last, though it ill becomes a West Countryman to confess it, I have a special affection—I had less knowledge of the Eastern Counties than of almost any other part of our islands. With the rear compartment of our “four-seater” filled with “samples,” neatly covered with a mackintosh cloth, we shook the dust of London from our wheels and steered along the trim road to Ongar, with patches of forest on our one hand, and undulating pasture lands, still lightly bathed in the September morning haze, upon the other. All through Essex and Suffolk and Norfolk we speeded, and while, not only in the towns, but in many a wayside High Street, my companion stopped at this or that shop to exhibit his wares, I wandered at will (so far as time allowed) to see what I might see. My friend, whom I suspect of having himself undertaken the journey as much from motives of pleasure as of profit, had, happily, no rigid plans, and not only was he willing to be lured into very unpromising business areas, but, when darkness fell, he was

as ready as I to take the hazard of fortune and not to seek shelter with too nice a discrimination. It was with much joy that we found ourselves sleeping one night at the "Angel" in Bury St. Edmunds, sacred, as all good Dickensians know, to the memory of Mr. Pickwick and his companions. But it was with equal satisfaction that, upon another evening, we ate plaice and chips, washed down with tea, at the common-table of a second-rate commercial hotel in Yarmouth market-place, or, at the end of another day, dined in state with fashionable tourists at Dovercourt.

The individual impressions that I retain of the journey are necessarily fragmentary and superficial : a boy learning to play the organ in St. Peter's Church at Sudbury ; the holy calm of the Abbey gardens at Bury St. Edmunds ; the battle of sun and mist over the Little Ouse at Thetford ; the wilderness of Thetford Warren ; the cosy " Griffin " at Attleborough ; the august silence of Wymondham ; evensong in Norwich Cathedral ; the Dutch aspect of Yarmouth, seen along the skyline of the marshes, from the Caister Road ; the desolate coast near Dunwich ; the cattle-market at Saxmundham ; the tolling

of a bell along the valley of the Stour from the church of Stratford St. Mary ; the gathering of darkness over the weed-strewn estuary at Manningtree ; starlight upon the sea at Harwich. . .

But one impression will always remain, I think, especially fresh in memory. As a necessary background for it, however, the more general impression must be emphasised that in traversing East Anglia—to which I have returned again and again since making the journey here recorded—one may enjoy the illusion, more fully than in any other reasonably accessible district, of having escaped from Modern England. You cannot, I know, “ indict a whole people ” ; nor can you condemn a whole period. Though there is to-day a healthy disposition to question the virtue of much of our modern “ progress,” none but the crazy-witted would doubt that, though it has been prolific of tares, it has also produced much wheat. (An unhappy simile, I grant you, since wheat—literal, material wheat—is indeed one of the things which modern England notoriously *has* failed to produce. However, let the metaphor stand.) I am not blind, I say, to the merits of our modern age. But he who wishes to see its uglier aspects

thrown vividly upon a screen cannot do better than travel into Essex and Suffolk.

To leave London by any of its eastern exits—to pass through miles of mean tenements and villas, with factories, warehouses, canals, gas-works and railway sidings chaotically interspersed, and then to find oneself, within an hour's space, in the quiet heart of Essex, is perceptibly to cross, as it were, the barrier of the Industrial Revolution. It is true that in Essex, as throughout the Eastern Counties, there is an intricate service of motor-'buses, linking towns and villages. But even the motor-'bus has done curiously little to shatter one's impression of having passed out of one age into another. It is only at infrequent intervals, after all, that a 'bus passes along this or that country road, disturbing its peace ; and where many 'buses meet, as they do in Colchester on market-day, they create a scene only superficially different from that associated with the slower vehicles of times past. The 'buses that make Colchester their centre are, to begin with, of many types and are painted in varied colours. There is no standardization like that by which the London General Omnibus Company has robbed Piccadilly and the Strand

of much of their former gaiety. There is the brilliant yellow 'bus from Mercia Island ; the " Silver Queen " from Walton-on-the-Naze, where all the winds of the world do battle ; the scarlet 'bus from Ipswich ; the brown single-decker, its roof piled high with baskets and boxes, from East Bergholt ; to say nothing of Moore's green 'bus from Kelvedon, Berry's chocolate one from Rowhead, and others. And, though the motor-'bus may travel more quickly than its predecessor, the horse-'bus, it has not induced the countryman to move more quickly than his progenitors. To watch the arrival and departure, the loading and unloading, of the motor-'buses in Colchester market-place, is to witness a scene as leisurely as the most stalwart opponent of " progress " could desire. There is, furthermore, this to be said in defence of the motor-'bus : that, by making the towns more accessible to the village folk, it encourages them to remain in the villages. The young farm-hand who, at the end of his day's work, can travel easily into town for a few hours and take his sweetheart to the " pictures," will be less tempted to leave the village than he would have been before petrol conquered the road ;

and it seems to me that, so far from spoiling the countryside, the motor-'bus is helping it to regain something of its lost character.

In Essex, then, in spite of the motor-'bus and the occasional panting of a mechanical plough, you may enjoy, if it be to your taste, almost the slowest life that rural England has to offer. Here, in the country lanes and the old villages, with their "greens" and ponds and their oftentimes splendid churches, and in little towns not more than thirty miles from the metropolis, you may talk with ruddy labourers who will tell you, in their own broad dialect, that they have never been to London in their lives, and who will speak of that city as though it were as far beyond their dreams as New York or the Golden Horn itself. And if Essex, for all its proximity to London, is one of the quietest of English counties, Suffolk is probably the least traversed and least known of them all. The reason for this is obvious. Suffolk is on the high road to nowhere; nor has it mineral resources to give it importance of its own. Outside the labyrinth of commercialism that is Modern England, it remains isolated—a country of windmills and scattered villages, of park-like woodlands alternating with

pasture and plough-lands and stretches of flat heath, where the only industries are those represented by the breweries or tanneries or timber-yards beside its "liliated, lowland streams." In Suffolk life goes on to-day much, essentially, as it did in the time of Constable, whose boyhood loved its homely scenes, which, he always said, did more than anything else to make him what he was. The little Stour still flows undisturbed through the peaceful vale over which the tower of Dedham Church stands sentinel, and some of the watermills that are familiar to thousands upon the artist's canvas may still be seen with the fleshly eye. But few people ever go to see them. For nobody finds himself unexpectedly in Suffolk. He has deliberately to go there, and that, as a study of Bradshaw will show, is not an enterprise to be lightly undertaken. The wooded lanes and long, open roads of Suffolk are, therefore, almost incredibly silent and lonely; and that silence and loneliness make the setting for the impression which I am now to record.

It must not be forgotten that Ipswich is in Suffolk—the one blot of industrialism upon its otherwise virgin countryside. For two days my

friend and I had been threading our way through that countryside, when, with our souls full of its incommunicable peace, we suddenly found ourselves—for though subconsciously we knew that we were nearing the town, the fact had not really enthroned itself in our brains—at the top of a steep descent into Ipswich. We found, moreover, that our arrival there had synchronised with the after-dinner rush of clerks and workers back to office and shop. We looked at our watches ; the time was a quarter to two. The road before us, now hemmed in with villas on either side, was thronged with a dense army of pedestrians and cyclists. I say a “dense army,” for such, in that cramped and tortuous thoroughfare, it was ; and, if every second person in America boasts his “Ford,” every other person in Ipswich apparently rides a velocipede. To make matters worse, a tramcar, groaning under its weight, yet constantly stopping to pick up more passengers, rattled slowly along in front of us. It was futile for us even to attempt to pass it, and our first sensation, on being thus hindered, was one of intense annoyance. God forgive us ! It is a temper too easily acquired by the motorist. I have done enough motoring

to realise how hardly shall they that have automobiles enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Thus we crawled into Ipswich, and, arriving in the central square, we passed into a veritable whirlpool of people rushing in on foot and wheel from all the various streets that converge there. Then, steering at right angles so as to gain the Hadleigh Road—for we were not stopping in Ipswich upon this journey—the tide of humanity with which we had drifted into the town was now turned against us as, driving at a snail's pace, we made to leave it. Wave upon wave, it began to break against us, like an angry sea lashing itself against a rock. Angry? Yes; for anger was clearly to be read upon many faces in that oncoming crowd. All those hundreds of men and women were hastening desperately (for it was now close upon the stroke of the clock) in one direction: what right had we—occupying half the width of the roadway—to be going in the other? Why should we be making for the country when they were all making for the town?

We might, of course, if we had given the least thought to the matter, have foreseen and avoided all this. But we had approached Ips-

wich, as I have said, in that dreamy mood into which one is lulled as, hour after hour, one glides, to the soft rhythm of wheels, through a countryside of unbroken stillness. It was, therefore, with a shock equal to that of a heavy physical blow that we found ourselves unexpectedly whirled in a moment out of solitude into multitude. And now, as we left Ipswich behind us almost as suddenly as we had entered it, and as we sped, towards Constable's valley, through a silence still more intensified by our contact with the town, I felt something break inside my brain. And I knew at once what it was that had broken. It was the dead weight of custom that presses upon the mind and prevents it from seeing, in any true sense, those things that are familiar to it. In a flash, I realised, as I had never realised before, the modern herding of men into great cities. If I had been a visitor from some distant and lonely planet, instead of one who has spent a good part of his life among crowds, the spectacle of that anxious army of men and women scurrying back to work along the narrow streets of Ipswich—a spectacle that, for the rest of the day, remained violently burnt into my brain—could not have struck me as being a sight

more novel and extraordinary ; nor could I have marvelled more than I did now at the mingled comedy and tragedy of a social system that demands of us that we should all do the same things, in the same way, and at the same time as one another.

I do not need to be reminded, of course, that Ipswich is not a " great city." I know that it is but a small town, as modern towns go. But it is one of the little ironies of life that one must go to Ipswich in order to see what should be seen so much more easily in Glasgow or Birmingham. For one approaches the big cities gradually and with a mind prepared. Even if one does reach them through a succession of smaller industrial towns, they themselves send out long straggling arms to warn the traveller ; so that, in the popular phrase, he is " let down gently." If, with eyes washed clear by the spacious and smokeless horizons of Suffolk, one could be precipitated into the vortex of Glasgow or Birmingham as suddenly as we found ourselves in the crowded streets of Ipswich, then indeed one might be able to see Glasgow or Birmingham for what they really are. It would not be a pleasant sight.

On Fools

On Fools

FOOLS, it is commonly said, are of two sorts : those who are fools and know it, and those who are fools and do not know it. That there are plenty of fools of the latter kind will be disputed by none, though few of us, perhaps, will be ready to admit that we ourselves may belong to that category. But that there are fools who know that they are fools is a statement which I challenge. For if a man knows himself to be a fool, by that very token, paradoxically, he is not one ; for he has that self-knowledge which is no small part of wisdom. That there are, broadly speaking, two classes of fools I agree ; but I would define them as those who are fools and do not mind being treated as such (by which, of course, I do not mean subjected to ridicule or contempt, but to tactful instruction and guidance), and those who are fools, but expect to be regarded as fully responsible beings.

Of these two classes, the latter is the more unpleasant to encounter. But not all fools belonging even to this class are equally irritating. This class may, indeed, be divided into two sub-classes. There are, to begin with, those fools who lack all sense and will make no effort to gain any, but who, though they annoy us by claiming the rights, while attempting to perform none of the duties, of normal beings, do not at any rate enrage us by pretending to be abnormally wise. Such fools arouse in us the same mild vexation of temper as swelled-headed children who are not content to remain children, but demand all the respect and privileges accorded to maturity. But there is a worse type of fool than this—the pedagogue who, in his own estimation, is infallible. This fool, who may actually *know* much, but who *understands* nothing; whose weight of acquired learning has crushed whatever sympathy, intuition and native wisdom he may ever have had: this fool, who thinks that his mastery of dead languages or mathematics or theology gives him the power and the right to pass final judgment on all the subtle and delicate problems of human life, is of all fools the

biggest, and of all fools the most difficult to suffer gladly.

I come now to the first of our two main classes of fools—the simpler fool, who does not resent instruction, even though he may prove incapable of following it. About this kind of fool there is often something, if not positively attractive, at least quite appealing. He resembles in some degree the child who is unconsciously satisfied to remain a child ; for, if he have not the charm of a real child, he has frequently something of its innocence and careless contentment. He is, as a rule, of an amiable, even, and willing disposition. And well, indeed, he may be. For his very nature makes for him a haven in which he dwells cosily sheltered from most of the storms of conflicting passions that beat upon the hearts of ordinary men. He is not tortured with unattainable ideals or personal ambitions ; and consequently he knows little of despair and disillusionment. The tragedies of the world lie beyond his comprehension, and for his own sorrows he has a short memory. He lives, indeed, in a fool's paradise ; and something of that paradise he sheds around him. His serenity of temper, I grant you, is not a lofty

serenity, or one that, in our nobler moments, we would envy. But, in this world of turmoil, even a poor serenity is sometimes welcome ; and though this fool is constantly giving a temporary jar to one's nerves by reason of his inefficiency, yet his unfailing good temper and willingness often prove, in the main, very soothing. For, just as one comes near to losing patience with him, he moves one irresistibly to humour, with which is mingled pity. But in our humour there is no scorn, and in our pity there is none of that anger which the learned or pretentious fool provokes in us. In a word, we feel tenderly towards him. And perhaps it is, more than all else, because of this fact that we have for the simple, unassuming fool a certain abiding affection. For we can hardly help liking those who awaken in us emotions of tenderness.

There are, it is true, some men in whom tenderness burns but dimly, and this brings me to my final point, which is this : that the simpler kind of fool is a counter on which the coin of other men's characters may surely be tested. If a man is ready to take mean advantage of the good nature of a willing fool, it is clear that there

is rottenness at the core of his heart. If, on the other hand, he treats the fool with as much consideration as he would extend to persons who are more able to defend themselves, then he is an honourable man and to be trusted.

*On Public Libraries, Deceased
Seamen, and Grocers*

On Public Libraries, Deceased Seamen, and Grocers

PUBLIC Libraries serve a variety of useful purposes. I even know people—they were born under lucky stars—who are able quite often, at these admirable institutions, to read the newspapers or magazines which they actually desire to read. Such, however, is seldom my good fortune. The last time, for instance, that I entered a Public Library, intending to enjoy the newest flashes of Mr. Massingham's brilliant cynicism, a commercial traveller was stealthily eating a sandwich over the pages of *The Nation*, which now, alas, knows Mr. Massingham no more. I made for one of the illustrated weeklies, but it also was engaged. Two women were sitting in front of it, holding a quiet but animated conversation about a hat which they had seen in the window of a neighbouring shop. I passed on to *The Spectator*, but a gentleman—

if Mr. St. Leo Strachey will allow me to use that term somewhat loosely—had fallen asleep over its editorial. I am not suggesting that the editorial had sent him to sleep. I doubt if the gentleman had opened the paper with any thought of reading it. He did not look like the sort of person who naturally would read *The Spectator*. He was not quite respectable. He was in rags. . . . Still hopeful, I said to myself : “ To-day being Tuesday, I will read Mr. Arthur Waugh’s weekly article in *The Daily Telegraph* ” ; but a solid phalanx of people, desirous of finding situations as motor-drivers, bricklayers, skilled mechanics, cigar-stall attendants, “ active representatives ” for City firms, handy-men for gardens, and what-not, rendered futile any attempt to penetrate into the inner fastnesses of that well fortified journal. And when, even yet not despairing, I resolved to see what Manchester was thinking to-day, my ambition was frustrated by a fellow with a top hat, who, standing squarely in front of the *Guardian* of the Northern metropolis, had just begun to read a triple-column company prospectus, and was clearly determined to follow it deliberately to the end. He looked as if he could have afforded

to buy the paper ; and indeed it is usually the folk who could with impunity purchase all their pet journals who contrive to secure the use of them in Public Libraries. It is people like us, dear reader, who suffer.

Yet, even for us unfortunate ones, Public Libraries have, as I have said, their uses. Their advantages as places of resort for eating or sleeping or the discussion of hats need not be stressed: they are obvious. But there is a virtue in Public Libraries that is less generally recognised than it should be. We may not be able to read in Public Libraries the papers that we want to read; but we are often beguiled into reading those we do not want to read. And the papers that we do not want to read are much better for us. They enlarge our vision. They lead us into avenues of knowledge and thought that we should not spontaneously enter. They take us out of the ruts.

A minor poet enters a Public Library. He wishes to see what *The London Mercury* says (if it says anything at all) about his new book of poems. His mentality (or his vanity) so colours for him the world that he sees it as a place where poetical reputations are the only things of any

moment. This lean and miserable minor poet, I say, steers for *The London Mercury* ; but a stout schoolmistress, who likes to be abreast of the times, as every schoolmistress should, is in occupation of it, poring over the latest importations of free verse from America. The poor, cadaverous minor poet finds all the other literary organs similarly “ bespoke,” as they say in the tailoring profession. (I fear no contradiction about that word, for I once found it in a tailors’ journal in a Public Library : it was the day I wanted to read about the perambulator race to Brighton—the most dramatic and inspiring event of modern times.) What, therefore, will our delapidated minor poet do ? Will he immediately slink out of the Public Library, looking more woe-begone (if that were possible) than when he entered it ? He may do so ; but the chances are that he will sit down before some journal that *is* at liberty, either in the hope that the schoolmistress will soon vacate *The London Mercury*, or merely because he is tired and wants a seat. And, furthermore, the chances are—for things happen in this way at Public Libraries—that the paper before which he sits down will be *The Drapers’ Record* or *The Meat-Trades Jour-*

nal—which latter, I may say in parenthesis, for the benefit of parents with limited means, makes an excellent cheap animal picture book for the children. I do not suggest that of necessity the languishing minor poet will read *The Drapers' Record* or *The Meat-Trades Journal*. But I do say that if he does it will be vastly to the benefit of his soul. It will give it stability and balance. And, in any case, the mere act of scanning those periodicals, or even noting their names, will remind him—or inform him, if he does not already know—that there are whole worlds (and vaster worlds than those over which *The London Mercury* shines) that care not a pin or an ox-tail for the fluctuations of the literary exchange. And that knowledge (if anything ever could instil humility into a minor poet) will give our lisping versifier food for thought.

And the minor poet is not the only person who may thus reap gain for his soul in Public Libraries. The process I have described in his case is capable of wide application. Consider, for example, the stock-broker taking up *The Poetry Review*. Please your imagination with the vision of a prohibitionist seating himself before *The Brewers' Journal*, or a racing enthu-

siast contemplating *The Sunday School Chronicle*. Think of a Plymouth Brother or one of the Peculiar People—a tribe indigenous to the soil of Essex—confronted with *The Dancing Mirror*. Picture to yourself the habitual reader of *Home Chat* faced with *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, or the regular student of *The Musical Times* or *Our Pets* surveying the solemn pages of *The Engineering News*. The possibilities are endless. I fear that they are not always turned to the fullest advantage. Still, the leaven works. Our Public Libraries make for catholicity of outlook.

For myself, thanks to my lack of success in obtaining the papers of my desire, I owe an inestimable debt of gratitude to Public Libraries, which I have regularly frequented for many years. Instead of wasting time upon what was already familiar to me—instead of merely reading the same views in the same newspapers day after day and week by week—I have been led to contemplate the thoughts and works of man in all their multitudinous and complex variety. But I was once nearly shocked out of the Public Library habit. I was in a little town in South Wales. It was a very nasty little town,

as the towns in South Wales mostly are : though South Wales is not all towns, and is not so often explored as it deserves to be. Having an hour to spare, I made for the Public Library, hoping against hope to scan some of my favourite prints. But not only my favourite sheets were in demand. There was in all that institution only one periodical of any sort unclaimed. I took that solitary periodical from its rack, and settled myself comfortably down to peruse it, whatever it might be. But comfort was soon to fly. Believe me : I have, during a long experience of Public Libraries, struck some very dismal rags, but never have I come upon such a melancholy one as that which I now held in my hands. It was called the *Register of Deceased Seamen*. It had twelve large pages, of an uncouth shape. The pages were ruled into columns, and in the columns were set down the names, ages, last ports of departure, and the dates, places, and nature of the deaths of hundreds of gallant sailors, many of whom seemed to have come not merely to untimely, but very terrible, ends. Some “ fell down the hold ” ; others died “ from shock after immersion.” The causes of decease were stated in other cases with a profusion of

medical detail ; and before I had read many such entries as that on January 23rd., John Hoppinshaw of Gravesend died at Tringganu of syncope from atheroma of the coronary arteries, sickness and horror took possession of me. Hitherto I had looked at the sea through the eyes of the poets :

“ The sea that harbours in her heart sublime
 The supreme heart of music deep as time,
 And in her spirit strong
 The spirit of all imaginable song.”

That is how the poets (bless them !) look at the sea. And that is how I had looked at it ; save when, indeed, in homelier moods, I had merely regarded it as a jolly place in which one spashes about, and before whose crooning and sparkling wavelets one lounges in summer in white flannelled ease. Now, however, I was made to think of it as a place upon which (to judge from the number of deaths recorded in this one journal) seamen have only to embark in order to become deceased. And yet, when you come to think of it, have not the poets set forth this aspect of the sea also ? Hear Spenser, for example :

“ So to the sea we came ; the sea, that is,
 A world of waters heapèd up on high,
 Rolling like mountains in wide wilderness,
 Horrible, hideous, roaring with hoarse cry.

‘ And is the sea ’ (quoth Coridon) ‘ so fearful ? ’
‘ Fearful much more ’ (quoth he) ‘ than heart can fear ;
Thousand wild beasts with deep mouths gaping direful
Therein still wait poor passengers to tear.’ ”

Yet Spenser never saw the *Register of Deceased Seamen* ! What imagination have these poets ! . . .

It was a long while before I entered a Public Library again. But the habits of a life-time are not easily shaken off. At last I drifted back again to my old haunts, and I am glad that I did so : for one day I had a very pleasant surprise—one of those surprises that come to a man only once or twice in a life-time. Nothing more attractive being available at a certain Public Library in the Midlands, I was reading *The Grocers’ Journal*. And there, at the bottom of a column describing how “ imported ” may best be palmed off as Wiltshire (or some technical matter of that kind), what do you think I found ? I found, in that *Grocers’ Journal*, a little paragraph about MYSELF. Of what possible interest it could be to the provisioning community to learn that I had just become “ reader ” to a certain publishing firm I cannot conceive, unless, forsooth, grocers as a class spend their leisure

hours in writing novels. I suspect that the editor, being at his wits' end for a "fill-up," had lifted the first paragraph his eyes fell upon in another newspaper. And yet, I have always had a good opinion of grocers. Ever since I was a boy (O remote time !), I have had the warmest admiration for these ingenious people who so deftly pat the butter into pounds, who so neatly cut the Stilton with a wire, and who by pulling a lever and turning a handle can slice the luscious "streaky" into any one of fourteen different thicknesses, of which I personally like number five. Yes, I have always had a warm admiration for grocers. But, since I saw that paragraph in their *Journal*, I have had a real affection for them.

The Ballade of a Publisher's Reader

I

I *HAD* a friend. We rambled year by year
Over the hills beside the summer sea ;
Until one day, amid our merry cheer,
He said : “ Why, don’t you read for Clark and
Lee ?
I’ve written a tale, ‘ The Curate’s Legacy,’
Which you (just possibly) might recommend
To them.” . . . I read it. . . I could not agree.
I lost that friend. But I have still one friend.

II

*I had another friend. When days were drear,
In the warm glow of winter firelight we
Would share the secrets that we held most dear ;
Until one night he said : “ Oh, you must see
Some verse I’ve done. It isn’t poetry,
And your most candid judgment won’t offend.” . .
Well, having read, I spoke most tactfully. . .
I lost that friend. But I have still one friend.*

III

*I had a third friend. Ay, he was the peer
Of all my friends. Summer and winter, he
And I had but one mind and heart—till fear
Stabbed me. He wrote a play called ‘Liberty!’
“Nay, keep it to yourself!” in agony
I cried. But oh, he did not comprehend
The meaning or the passion of my plea. . . .
I lost that friend. But I have still one friend.*

ENVOI

*Prince, rub your smooth, black nose against my
knee.
Wag your great tail, while over you I bend.
Thank God, you’ll never take to poesy. . . .
I lost my friends. But I have still one friend.*

On Being Oneself

On Being Oneself

WE were talking of epitaphs. When it came to my turn to state the words in which I would most like to be commemorated, I said that I would choose—with, of course the necessary alteration in the pronoun—a sentence used by Mr. Belloc in describing “A Good Woman” whom he knew : “She was never less than herself.” I added, however, without affectation, that, while I could think of no more desirable epitaph, I realised that those words, so rich in simple dignity, could not honestly be applied to me.

“He was never less than himself.” Of how many men in a generation could it truthfully be said ? Few of us would deny that we are consistently less than ourselves. Indeed, in our recognition of the fact, self-congratulation mingles with regret. Each of us carries in the locket of his soul a picture of the man he fondly fancies himself to be, yet knows he fails to be ;

and, while we often sincerely lament our habitual falling short of our potential selves, yet, looking from the opposite angle, we are pleased to feel that we are, after all, better "at heart" than we are in our actual conduct, and that if the perception of our friends were but a little keener, they would see what fine fellows we really are. Yet the ideal "self" which each of us enshrines in his imagination is, I believe, as a rule, but a replica on a nobler scale of his work-a-day self. It does not often occur to us, perhaps, that the true self may be different not only in degree, but also in kind, from the conventional self, and that we may never have discovered that true self at all.

In this we are not wholly to blame. Every child brings with him into the world his own individuality, his own unique genius; but, almost before he is out of the cradle, tradition and custom lay their repressive hands upon him, and, by the time he bestrides the earth in knickerbockers, all the powers that be have united in conspiracy against him. To-day, happily, we see the beginnings of a revolution in all branches of thought. The horizons upon which, as it seemed to us yesterday, there gleamed the

Promised Land have betrayed our hopes ; but already new horizons are unfolding for those who have eyes to see. The last century placed its trust in Democracy and Education ; but these things—or what, forsooth, have passed for these things—have signally failed us. Only extend the franchise, it was thought ; only bring the printed page within the reach of every man, and the millennium would be in sight. But, alas, this simple faith brought, not the millennium, but Armageddon ; and the world of to-day, as it is faithfully reflected in the popular press, offers evidence enough that in Democracy and Education, as they have been commonly understood, there lies no salvation. Those who saw in them the lights of an early dawn had reckoned without human nature. They had assumed that men were rational creatures, and that, if only they were given opportunities, they would necessarily make the best use of them. But in a welter of irrational hatred and bloodshed the sun of this shallow optimism has set.

Confronted with such a catastrophic eclipse of his hopes, the man of superficial sense may well wring his hands in despair. But men of tougher fibre will search the catastrophe for its lessons,

and out of failure will draw new knowledge, new courage, and new inspiration. That is what Mr. Edmond Holmes does in his latest book, which I have been reading.* Mr. Holmes is well-known by his previous volumes, and needs no introduction. He is the sworn foe of conventional education, which, with its system of uniform "cramming," its repressive discipline, its insistence upon results that can be tabulated, and its stimulation of the competitive spirit by means of the "bribery" of marks and prizes, is the antithesis of that true education in which alone he sees any hope for the future. Popular education drills the minds of children into machines, and fosters among the children themselves that rivalry and that desire for material rewards which have been the curse and ruin of our civilization. These things, indeed, have not been extraneous forces of destruction; they have been inherent in our civilisation itself, and education, instead of seeking to mould a new civilisation, has been content to reflect the worst evils of that already existing.

If we are to have a new world, we must, first of all, have a new education, and that education

* "Freedom and Growth, and other Essays." (Constable.)

must be one which does not repress, but which *educes*. The individuality of the child must not be crushed ; it must, in an atmosphere of freedom, be given every encouragement to expand. Increasingly it is being recognised that every normal child is born with an innate capacity for good, and with potentialities which, when fostered by freedom, instead of being crushed by mechanical teaching and cast-iron discipline, are found to be astonishingly rich. I have with my own eyes seen not only what can be achieved by freedom in a school for “ middle class ” boys such as that run by Mr. Norman MacMunn at Tiptree Hall, in Essex, but I have witnessed what can be done even at an elementary school in the wilds of Hackney Marshes, by a few masters with human hearts and a sense of vocation. Here, though the living material with which the teachers have to deal is of the poorest, a partial measure of “ free ” education has enabled boys who have never seen the sea or the hills, and seldom even the green fields, to produce paintings, drawings, essays and verses—not to mention mechanical models—that reveal a wonderful quality and variety of inward resources ; while even at Hackney freedom has

produced a "team" spirit that automatically settles the problem of discipline.

But, while there is not lacking the promise of better things, it is still generally true to say that all the established factors of life, economic, social, and educational, are arrayed solidly against the budding soul of youth, to prevent its putting forth any original shoots, and to force its growth into several conventional forms ; and by the time we reach manhood, if not before, most of us abandon the fight for our own personalities—if indeed we have ever made such a fight in a world that merely demands of us respectability or the sweat of our brows, according to the station of life into which (to use the customary misquotation of the Prayer Book) it has pleased God to call us. If we are not forced to sacrifice our souls in the struggle for daily bread, we still find it more comfortable and convenient to lay them upon the altar of things as they are. We cease to be ourselves and become mere patterns of our neighbours.

It has, I know, been said that, in order to save his life, a man must lose it. But the form of those words must not mislead us as to their substance. They do not mean that we are not to trouble

about self-fulfilment. We are, it is true, to avoid egotism ; to beware of cultivating and, as it were, hoarding our own personalities, our own selves, merely for the gratification of vanity. But, after all, a man cannot lose his life, in any real sense, unless first of all he has found it, and inasmuch as he neglects the discovery and development of his own individual potentialities, he must fail to give the world that service which is, of course, the true end of self-realisation. For it is not enough that a man should serve his day and generation. He must, if he is to be worthy of himself, yield that unique service which is the ripened fruit of the carefully nurtured plant of personality. Only through the development of personality will social peace and harmony ever be attained. Individualism may breed anarchy ; but individuality naturally produces a communal spirit. When men are spiritually and mentally repressed, they seek their pleasures and rewards outside themselves, and this leads inevitably to bitter rivalries for the possession of material things. But when individuality is developed, men discover that the Kingdom of Heaven is within them ; spiritual values replace material ones ; and, though differences and inequalities

are more marked than ever, they are no longer a source of hostility, but of mutual interest and strength.

So much for one aspect of the question of being oneself. There is another. Some few happy folk there are, more than ordinarily robust of soul, who do succeed, in defiance of all social opposition, in keeping alive their own selves ; who retain and develop their individual qualities of mind and heart, and who, unmoved by either the scorn or the flattery of their fellow men, exercise those qualities with all the charm of that true humility which comes of self-knowledge and combines natural assurance with perfect modesty. Of such people is the only real aristocracy composed. But of how many even of them can it be said that, being themselves, they are yet never less than themselves ? Sloth is a devil of whom even they do not always keep the upper hand ; even for them, as for their lesser brethren, it too often happens that the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.

To be never less than oneself ! First of all, to discover one's true self ; secondly, to keep that true self alive, against all the repressive influences of convention ; and, thirdly, never through

lassitude to fall short of that self ! Who indeed “ is sufficient for these things ” ? I wonder if Mr. Belloc’s “ Good Woman ” were really “ never less than herself.” If so, I wish that I too had known her.

Fog

Fog

SOME weeks ago I stood on the gracefully curving platform of York Station, waiting for the London train. York Station, with the trains of five railway companies constantly steaming in and out—I write before the accomplished fact of the new amalgamations that will reduce the number to two—is normally one of the most interesting of places. But on this particular morning—and it was a Monday morning—it was enveloped in a dense white fog, and my only consolation was the thought that in London the fog would most certainly be yellow or black. But that, after all, was small solace. I do not greatly mind the scenery through which one travels daily from Suburbia into London being obscured. But I count a long journey on one of our Northern or Western expresses among the chief joys of life. Not only are the trains, and the stations with their varying crowds, objects of unfailing interest in themselves ; but the swift

gliding motion of the express and the rhythm of the wheels, lull me into one of the best of all moods for communion with Nature. Rarely do I drink in so fully the spirit of the countryside as when I gaze out upon our homely, familiar landscapes through the window of a flying train. I say the *spirit* of the countryside, because I am not among those to whom Nature is an affair of Natural History. My praise of railway travelling as a means of communion with Nature will be ridiculed by those whose enjoyment of Nature takes the form of Botany or Ornithology. I have no desire to dissect Nature, and to study her amazing detail. I dread being among those who cannot see the wood for the trees. There are some happy folk, I know, who can see both. But, for myself, I prefer to remain on the safe side. It is the spirit of Nature—that sense of “something far more deeply interfused”—that I crave; and since that sense is always mine when I view the country from a train, I hold precious every moment of a long railway journey, and thus I was sorely depressed, that morning upon York platform, at the prospect of having even a fraction of my pleasure stolen from me by the clammy hands of fog.

I am told by a friend who holds a brief for that route that the East Coast trains keep, as a rule, excellent time. I will take his word for it. I can only record that on this occasion the train was late. I am not blaming it ; I am merely stating the fact—to which I must add that, when at length it did arrive, it was heated and crowded to suffocation. But it would not be for long, I promised myself. Another half-hour, another few miles south, and the fog would probably lift ; and, since a careful scrutiny of my fellow passengers assured me that we had no very choleric old men or asthmatical dames on board, there seemed to be a reasonable possibility that I might then be permitted to open the windows to the clean country air. But it was not to be. Now and again a faint half-gleam of sunlight struggled through the thick vapour outside, tantalizingly conveying the fact that it was a beautiful morning—above the fog. But such fitful gleams were only followed by deeper gloom, until it was impossible to see the nearest fence. Nevertheless, except as we threaded the network of junctions some miles south of York, we sped valiantly on, and my sense of discomfort and disappointment was lost for awhile in

wonderment at the organisation and the human nerve power that render possible the driving of a train, with its freight of hundreds of living souls, at almost full speed along an invisible track.

We passed Doncaster. The fog still held. In despair I turned to my newspaper. The first thing I read was an article on the growth of militarism in Japan, and its possible development in China. I was in a fit mood for receiving gloomy impressions, and immediately I found myself dwelling upon what seemed to be the inevitability of a clash between East and West—a war of such extent and horror that my mind sickened at the contemplation of it. I wish that even in normal moments I could assure myself that this talk of a conflict between Asia and the West is entirely a bogey. But I cannot do so. History points all too clearly to the possibility of such a catastrophe. Europe, we may dare to hope, even though there is at present no very reassuring evidence, is beginning to learn by bitter experience the futility and the crime of war ; but to the East, militarism, which it has derived from us, is a new toy, the fascination of which has only begun to make its appeal ; and it is not inconceivable, in the irony of events,

that, just as Europe is preparing to put away her sword, dripping with the blood of centuries, Asia may force her to unsheath it again. Unless a miracle in the shape of a wide dawning of light in men's hearts and minds occurs, an alliance of the Western nations against the East would seem to be, sooner or later, the almost certain trend of affairs. In normal moments, however, I know that miracles can and do happen, and that, if we will, we may yet avert that stupendous conflict which looms upon the horizon of possibility. But no such hope presented itself to me in the train that morning. The clouds of despair girdled my mind as completely as the fog enveloped the world outside. . . .

Grantham and Peterborough might have been wiped off the map, for all that could be seen of them in passing. It was now past one o'clock, and I was beginning to relinquish all hope of feasting my soul even for a few moments upon broad fields and bursting hedgerows, when suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, as we approached Huntingdon—behold, we were out in clear sunshine! Above, the sky was uncloudedly warm and blue. Below, the green and brown

acres, bathed in the mellow light of noon, spread away to far horizons ; while in the near distance I immediately caught a sight that sent a thrill of renewal through me—the figure of a ploughman at his work. Several times before, while travelling, the shining revelation of a ploughman at his plough had thus come to me through a sudden cleft in the mist ; but it came now with a freshness and with a sense of beauty and hope almost sacramental, filling me with resurrection. Why this should be so, I cannot tell. A ploughman is, after all, a common enough figure—even though much less common in England than he should be ; while the lot of the agricultural labourer under present (or past) conditions is certainly not a thing to provoke envy ! There is, let us admit, an immense amount of nonsense talked about Nature and the Simple Life. And yet, when we have purged ourselves as rigorously as may be of all humbug and false idealisation, the ploughman remains, as he has always been, the symbol of the healthy, natural, free life of man, which, through the centuries, has been marred by Greed and Ambition, and in these latter days almost completely destroyed by the Industrial Revolution.

Almost, but not quite. For the divine spark in man refuses to be wholly extinguished ; and there are signs that it is beginning to glow once more into flame. Men are coming to distrust the machines that have created wealth, but crushed happiness. And perhaps, as my train suddenly ran out of the fog that morning and I saw the ploughman at his work, my subconscious mind glowed with the hope that men will in very deed attain some day to health and simplicity and joy, when the mists of our false civilisations have dispersed.

It may have been so. I only know that as the train plunged into the gloom of the London tunnels, and for a long while after I had mingled with the jostling crowds of King's Cross and the Euston Road, I saw, not the ugliness and squalor of a great city, with its anxious and pale-faced multitudes, but the figure of a ploughman, ploughing the fields of England under the sky of early Spring.

Passion Week

*T*WO thousand years ago they bound
The Son of Man upon a tree,
And we, when Passion Week comes round,
Commemorate His agony.

*Two thousand years ago it was—
So long ago, so far away—
That Jesus prayed the cup might pass
From Him—. Yet has it passed to-day?*

*Brothers, what ruin have we made
Of all His blessèd earth so fair?
Look round! Look round! Behold, the shade
Of Calvary is everywhere.*

*Still to His cross He goes. While dim
Memories of His old pain speak
Unto our broken world, for Him
Each new week still is Passion Week.*

The Motorman

The Motorman

SOMETIMES—I confess it without shame —as I lie, late at night or early in the morning, in that blessed state “betwixt sleeping and waking,” I find myself subconsciously playing some of the old games with which as a boy I used to beguile my sleepless hours in bed. These games were, of course, wholly of the imagination. I suppose most children play them, though it is probable that they are played less by those soundly-sleeping youngsters who expend their energy during the daytime in cricket or football than by those who find small satisfaction in such conventional pursuits. Many boys, no doubt, as they lie snugly tucked between the sheets, awaiting sleep or freshly returned from it, play in fancy some favourite rôle from *Treasure Island* or *The Arabian Nights*, with, needless to say, certain improvements of detail to suit their own individual tastes. When I was young, how-

ever, I read very little, and preferred to take my characters, however homely they might be, from the world I actually knew rather than accept them ready-made from books.

The characters I assumed were, indeed, very humble ones. I never recall triumphantly winning a battle as I lay in bed, or going, an unflinching martyr, to the stake. I do not even remember landing a smuggled cargo safely upon some sheltered and comfortable quay—though I think I might have done this if I had seen Boscastle harbour in my early days. I did not indulge in heroics. I chose rather to be an ordinary labourer or, at best, a skilled mechanic. Thus, when my light was put out and sleep lay yet some time ahead, I would, one night, be a carter driving a waggon filled with hay—myself very comfortably sprawling upon the top of it—from the country to the market town. (The waggon, I remember, was painted ultramarine blue, and it had red wheels. . . . And there were two excellent inns along the road.) Another night I would be a bargee holding the tiller of my laborious craft as the tide washed it downstream through the crowded shipping and the romantic moonlight of the Pool. Or,

again, I would be a motorman running an electric tramcar from the heart of my own city to the suburban terminus near my home. Or, finally, I would be either an engine-driver or the guard of a goods train, sitting by the fire (or is it a stove ?) in his cosy brake-van at the rear of a long line of coal trucks.

The details, it will be seen, varied ; but the game was always fundamentally the same. Motion entered largely into it, but there was more in it than mere motion. Labour followed by rest ; cold followed by warmth ; hunger followed by feasting ; in these—or more fully, perhaps, in the anticipation of them—lay the real essence of the business. Let us suppose, for instance, that I elected to be a tram-driver. As I undressed for the night, I would imagine myself to be standing beside my car at the central terminus of the town, waiting for the hands of the Clock Tower to register the time of starting. The car started, of course, at the moment of my getting into bed. It was always, in my fancy, a little before midnight, and this was to be the last trip. The late cars did not return to the town, but were stabled for the night at the suburban terminus ; and

I pictured my small villa as being situated in a village a few minutes' walk beyond this local dépôt. Though it might in fact be high summer, I always imagined it to be perishingly cold. There was usually a biting east wind, with drifting snowflakes. This was, of course, in order to enhance, by force of contrast, the delight of the warm fire that awaited me at the journey's end ; and, similarly, I pretended to be very hungry and tired, so as to render doubly sweet the hearty meal and the lounge before the fire with which my game finished—if, that is to say, I succeeded in keeping awake long enough. For though I had to feign the hunger and the cold, I did not always have to invent the tiredness ; and sometimes sleep would catch me unawares whilst my car was still but ascending the steep hill that connected the town with the inner suburbs, or whilst it was running between the fine mansions and stately trees that lined the latter and more rural stages of its route.

But as a rule I did manage to keep sleep at bay. It often cost me a determined effort ; but such effort was in itself no small part of the fun. It was a twenty minutes' trip that I had to

do, and in my mind I followed precisely every stage of the three-mile course, making as best I could with my hands the proper movements of the imaginary control-lever and brake-handle, and softly humming or hissing to myself a representation of the varying noises which from experience I knew the cars to make as they went up or down hill or negotiated the different curves and junctions along the track. Among several special features of the journey that I never failed to introduce was a passenger who, boarding the car at an early stopping-place, deposited some heavy luggage upon my platform at the front, and who never failed to give me a handsome tip when, upon his alighting, I helped him to lift his baggage to the ground. I had once seen a real man give a real tram-driver a real tip for a small service of this kind, and the pleasure that illumined the driver's face—for tram-drivers do not receive many tips—had burnt itself into my brain.

As I drew nearer and nearer to the journey's end, my sense of tiredness and hunger, of course, would greatly increase. And indeed it was often with genuine relief that I heard the points at the terminus click slowly as the wheels

of the car passed over them and then came to rest. For all this time I had kept both mind and muscle upon the strain. But now, as I exchanged a cheery "Good night" with the cleaners on duty at the local dépôt where I left my car, I allowed myself—with what infinite relish!—to relax, and to snuggle at last into the warm folds of the bedclothes. Soon, having received a most cordial greeting from my imaginary wife, I would be settled before the roasting fire in a small snug room, listening to the wind rattling the window-pane, and eating the best food and drinking the best hot liquids that ever refreshed a weary tram-driver at the end of his day's work—until, as my fancy still gorged itself with these delights, sleep would suddenly claim me for its own.

And still sometimes as I lie in bed in that blissful state of semi-consciousness, I find myself feeling for the imaginary control-lever and the imaginary brake-handle, and driving my tramcar along the familiar roads of home. And here occurs a pleasant idea. Does not psycho-analysis tell us that a man's real self is not his conscious, but his subconscious, self

—that, in fact, he is more genuinely himself when he lies “ betwixt sleeping and waking ” than when he is totting up the week’s balance or snatching his midday lunch at Messrs. Joseph Tigers and Sons’ restaurant ? If this be so, then I am not truly, after all, the rather dignified but very dull person who goes mechanically to business every day, carrying a neatly folded umbrella and an attaché-case. My real self is still the boy I used to be. It is indeed a very happy thought. God bless the psycho-analysts !

On Railways and Theology

On Railways and Theology

THE man who says he has no hobbies deceives himself, and the truth is not in him. I know that all men do not, when they have dined each evening, take out their stamp-albums or turn to their collections of defunct beetles. But breathes there a man with soul so dead that it does not strangely kindle within him when a conversation in which he is engaged, or which he is fortunate enough to overhear, chances upon some theme that bears no obvious relation to the main current of his interests, but which moves him nevertheless to a lively, if oftentimes inexplicable, enthusiasm? We may not, all of us, have hobbies for the hands; but few of us lack hobbies of the mind.

To-day I was in the company of some men who bored me very much—though not so much, I am willing to believe, as I bored them. They chattered about many things, but none of them

were things for which I cared a halfpenny. They talked, among other matters, upon books, and looked at me in a manner which implied : “ Now, surely *that* will interest you ! ” But it did not interest me, because they talked of books not as men do who read for the true enlargement of mind and spirit, but as folk who follow the fashion of the hour. I strove to be pleasantly responsive, but the soul within me was lead—until, by some unforeseen turn, the conversation settled itself upon railways. Instantly I was all genuine attention and was prepared now for the talk to continue indefinitely. Railways are among my hobbies. For me the magic vein had been struck.

Why railways should be among my hobbies I cannot say. I could, it is true, name some very good reasons why every man (and every woman, too) should be keenly interested in them ; yet none of those reasons explains my own infatuation. “ Railways,” said John Bright, “ have rendered more services, and received less thanks, than any other institution in the world ” ; and it is not for me to contradict him. Yet if our interest in people and things were proportionate to the gratitude we owe

them, life would become so exacting and complicated as to drive us all into the lunatic asylums. We receive so many benefits that we must perforce take most of them for granted. I owe, no doubt, a deep debt of gratitude to the plumber who has just been in the room above me, mending a pipe ; but I am not at all interested in the mysteries of his art, and very much resent his occasional presence in the house. I am under great obligations, again, to the patient hen that lays my breakfast egg ; yet I know (and care) no more about poultry than I do about the secrets of coal-formation in the earth. There was a hymn, much in vogue in certain circles when I was a boy, which exhorted you to “ Count your blessings one by one ” ; but if indeed we followed that precept, true gratitude, which expresses itself in the use that we make of our blessings, would dissipate itself in perpetual contemplation. Life is so infinite in riches, whether we turn upon it the microscope or the telescope, that one grows dizzy in any attempt to compass them. It is not strange that each of us should have comparatively few interests. But it is strange that a man’s interests should often be mixed so

arbitrarily. Why should Lord Kitchener, of all men, have loved old china? Why should one of the gentlest of my friends be a boxing enthusiast? And why should I, whose main preoccupation is not with business or affairs, and whose natural bent of mind is towards generalisation rather than particularity, find endless satisfaction not merely in the more picturesque and romantic aspects of the railway (shade of John Ruskin forgive me!), but in the minutest details of railway mechanism, organisation and administration?

I recall that when I was at a school in which Geography was not considered an important subject, I had to sit for one of the University examinations in which that subject was optional. And I remember that, having entered myself for it, I was ushered into the Headmaster's sanctuary and admonished that, if I wished to pass the examination, I should forsake Geography and cleave to one of the other optional subjects instead. But I, caring little whether I passed the examination or not, went cheerfully upon my way; and great was my delight when at length the evening for the Geography

paper arrived. That evening was the one triumph of my school life. For that Geography paper, I, who could not as a rule gain a decent number of marks for anything, secured almost the maximum obtainable. The paper began, I remember, with the demand, gladly obeyed, to "write a brief description of any typical industrial area in the West Riding," and, through a series of questions equally reasonable, it reached its matchless climax in "Draw a sketch-map showing the lines converging upon any three of the following railway centres . . ."

I forget now what the seven appointed centres were, but I know that I could have done them all with the same meticulous accuracy that I brought to bear upon (a) Trent Junction, (c) Bristol, and (e) Carlisle. In drawing Bristol, I was at special pains to show that the main line from Paddington to South Wales did not run into Temple Meads station, but only skirted the western metropolis at Stapleton Road ; and, when I came to Carlisle, it was with unholy joy that I put in not only the two English and three Scottish grand trunk lines, but also the pottering branch of the North-

Eastern from Newcastle-on-Tyne, and the equally insignificant Maryport and Carlisle Railway. Apart from my natural zest in this occupation of drawing railway junctions (in which I often engaged stealthily when, during "preparation" classes, I should have been devoting myself to Greek or English grammar), and apart also from the unique sensation of being able to answer an examination paper, my joy that evening was inspired by the knowledge that I was scoring a point off the Headmaster; and I suppose that no boy has too great an affection for his Head to enjoy doing that.

The passion of my youth has remained with me, and to-day Bradshaw is among the best-thumbed books upon my shelf. There are moods of gloom, indeed, in which I turn in vain to human society or to the poets, but in which I never fail to draw solace from studying railway statistics or from pondering elaborately over railway maps, pictures, and diagrams. And whenever I loiter about great stations—which I very often do—I not only delight, as all save those with harassed nerves must do, in the general life and bustle of the place, and

in the appreciation of the twofold fact of human fellowship and human diversity which it always freshly inspires, but I never tire of watching the station staff at work, and of observing the marvellous ingenuity, order, precision, and discipline that mark—quite unappreciated by the ordinary traveller—the manipulating of the traffic. And yet if I go into other places (as, for example, into certain kinds of factories) where the same qualities are equally much in evidence, I am not at all impressed. Why is it? Every man, they say, could write one novel. May it similarly be that every man could manage one business concern? At any rate, I sometimes flatter myself by fancying that, if I had not followed visions instead of facts, I might some day have sat where Mr. Felix J. C. Pole now sits at Paddington, controlling the life that pulses through that wonderful system whose arteries spread to Penzance, to Fishguard, and to Birkenhead. But that, certainly, is to yield to vision! . . . Enough! I will apply the brake, while my subject is yet under control.

Another hobby of mine (I might weary the reader with more; but blessed are the merciful)

is Theology. I can see no very clear link of association between railways and theology ; nor, to judge by his arching eyebrow and his unfailing “ Beg pardon, Sir ? ” can the book-stall clerk whom I ask in the same breath for *The Railway Magazine* and the *Hibbert Journal*. A possible connection dawns upon me as I write. Have not railways to do with the journeys of the body, while theology deals with the journey of the soul ? However that may be, the two things hold me equally under their spell ; so that if I cannot sit up all night with some worthy companion, weighing the respective merits of the British, French and German railways systems, or discussing the methods of handling trains at Perth or Shrewsbury or Pontypool Road, or arguing about the shortest mileage route from Saffron Walden to Penrhinceiber, let me burn the midnight oil over theories of the Trinity and the Atonement. If the transition seem to some to be almost blasphemously abrupt (though I do not know why it should), I cannot help it. It is the way I am made. It is the way in which most of us are made. A thousand different tributaries have mingled themselves in the stream of our

ancestry and we are, at the best, irrational creatures.

How irrational is my interest in theology I never fail to remind myself when I have spent some hours in happy thralldom to it. For, being in the confessional, I must admit that I have little faith in theology, which bears no more necessary relation to religion than a knowledge of the processes of mastication does to the enjoyment of a good meal. The processes of mastication are, of course, a legitimate subject for curiosity and investigation ; but a constant preoccupation with them is the surest guarantee of dyspepsia. As for theology, I would go further, and, having done with such mincing metaphors, I would say that it has built mountains of prejudice and caused oceans of blood to flow, and that it has done more than any other influence to darken the simple counsel that a man should walk humbly and love his neighbour as himself. And yet . . . and yet . . . I know that the very next time the bugle of theological controversy sounds in my ears I shall mount my hobby-horse, and ride into the lists.

Well, it is good that our hobby-horses should

sometimes gallop away with us. They may carry us into very unfertile fields. But at least they take us out of ourselves. And who is there too good or too wise to benefit by such an escape ?

On Stamps

On Stamps

IT is a trite observation upon Hobbies that they take a man out of himself. It is equally a truism that they serve the more positive end of taking him, not merely out of himself, but into other men. Yet fresh experience is constantly needed to give vitality to such platitudes—a reflection to which I am led by an incident that recently quickened within myself a true appreciation of the fact that a Hobby, being no less than a bridge to span

“The yawning gulf which sunders friend from friend,” may indeed be a sacramental thing.

I must confess, by way of introduction, that I could never understand the popular craze for collecting postage stamps. Indeed, I could never understand the mania for collecting anything at all. To begin with, it demands habits of care and neatness, which are anathema to the lazy soul. Secondly—if I may say so

without giving undue offence to the reader, who is sure to be a collector of something or other—it seems to me (or did seem until the other day) to be so pointless. To collect books, for instance—to dote upon the mere outward trappings of them ; to love them as mere paper and print and binders' cloth : is not this equivalent to preferring the company of corpses to the society of living men and women ? What matters to me—to change the metaphor—is the spiritual essence of a book, and, when once I have absorbed that essence into myself, I have no more use for the material book itself than I have for the shell from which the nut has been eaten, or the bottle from which all the liquor has been poured. There are, of course, some books that are inexhaustible springs of refreshment—casks that, like the widow's cruse, are unfailing. But how few they are ! For the rest, a book, once read, is for me a spent and lifeless thing ; and, for all I care, the dustman may take it away with the broken nutshells and the empty bottles. But to return to Stamps.

It happened the other week that, during a visit to the loveliest valley of the West Country,

I went to see a friend whom I had not met for a long time. He was engaged in the London telegraphic service, till, in the course of his duties, he suffered a nervous breakdown that has compelled him for many years to live with his wife in the almost complete seclusion of an isolated hillside farm, overlooking one of the most beautiful bends of England's most beautiful river. His disease is of a particularly acute and distressing nature, and causes him, in the presence of unaccustomed visitors, to lose entire control of himself. I was warned by the ferryman in whose little boat I crossed the river, while the evening light lay mellow upon the uplands, and the birds sang as they only sing in May, and there came the far cries of village boys at cricket, that my friend would probably shriek aloud when he first saw me. And the ferryman was right. When I had climbed through the bluebelled woods to my friend's house, and entered at last the room in which, haggard and bearded and prematurely old, he lay upon his sofa by the window, with a far-extending panorama of delight spread below him, he was rent by spasms that were pitiable to see, and shrieked in a manner that

made me understand what they meant of old when they spoke of men being torn by "evil spirits." It is true that the next second he commanded himself by a supreme effort, and apologised to me ; but the apology had barely left his lips before another nerve-storm convulsed him from head to foot and another shriek broke horribly upon the evening stillness.

For a time I found myself in a very uncomfortable position. I tried to talk with my friend upon a variety of themes ; but nothing availed to soothe him. Suddenly, however, I remembered that he used to be an enthusiastic stamp-collector. A happy idea ! I mentioned stamps. Instantly, as by a miracle, he became quite calm, and his speech began to flow steadily and clear. For a few minutes I was able to deceive him, and his conversation was that of a normal and very alert man. But my triumph was short-lived. For my friend soon discovered that I really knew nothing about the secrets of philately, and that my interest in stamps was but feigned for his benefit. Then, alas, the spell was broken, and he relapsed at once into his former condition.

When I left my friend and descended the hillside, night had fallen, and, in the woods upon the far bank of the silver-gleaming river, the moon had "touched the brown-bird's throat." But its voice opened for me no magic casements. My heart was heavy within me. I argued with myself that its heaviness was unreasonable. I told myself that it is impossible, however good one's will, to know everything in this multifarious world, or even to be interested in everything. But reason could not temper my grief. I continued to curse my ignorance about stamps. If I had but known something about them, if only I had been able to discuss them in the idiom common to philatelists, I knew that I could have shed a little light into a dark place. I could have drawn my friend out of himself. I could have given him, and gained for myself, an hour of fellowship. I now saw, indeed, that a postage stamp will not only take a letter to a far town or a distant country, but that it may also carry a human heart into the foreign land of another human heart. I appreciated, as never before, the baseness of that religion which would divide things into "sacred" and "secular," since at

any moment the most trivial object in which one is spontaneously interested may prove to be the passport into the kingdom of fellowship, which is only another name for the Kingdom of Heaven. And when I returned home, and thought of my friend yonder in the West Country, I turned up a certain passage in Mr. Gilbert Chesterton's *What I Saw in America*. Mr. Chesterton, one feels, might have seen it quite as clearly as he sat in his own garden at Beaconsfield ; but that is by the way. The passage is this :

“The devil can quote Scripture for his own purpose ; and the text of Scripture which he now most commonly quotes is ‘The Kingdom of Heaven is within you.’ That text has been the stay and support of more Pharisees and prigs and self-righteous spiritual bullies than all the dogmas in creation ; it has served to identify self-satisfaction with the peace that passes all understanding. And the text to be quoted in answer to it is that which declares that no man can receive the Kingdom except as a little child. What we are to have inside is the childlike spirit, but the childlike spirit is not entirely concerned with what is inside. It is the first mark of possessing it that one is interested in what is outside. The most childlike thing about

the child is his curiosity and his appetite and his power of wonder at the world. We might almost say that the whole advantage of having the Kingdom inside us is that we look for it somewhere else."

Yes, it is a divinely childlike instinct that makes us seek the Kingdom in the world outside us—even if we only seek it in bric-à-brac—or in Stamps !

On Cigarette Pictures

On Cigarette Pictures

THE other day, having received a cheque for an article I had forgotten having written, I said to myself : “ For one crowded hour of glorious life I will throw care to the winds, and, in one respect at least I will be as the lords of creation, whose bespatted feet tread the pavements of Bond Street and Piccadilly.” Ostentatiously brandishing a Treasury note (a whole one, not a “ half ”), I entered a tobacconist’s, and bought a packet of the most expensive cigarettes. What did I do on coming out ? Did I daintily place one of the cigarettes in an ivory holder, and, kindling a light on a silver match-box, cause a few delicate wreaths of the luxurious incense to curl themselves lazily upon the June air ? Not I. I suddenly forgot my ambition to be as the lords of creation, and looked instinctively for the cigarette picture.

But there was none. Instead there was a

horrid little notice to the effect that *all* the value for my money—and a rare lot of money it was too—was in the cigarettes themselves, and that the manufacturers had therefore no need to propitiate me by offering pictures or prizes or other “bribes.” Now, in general principle, I hold that the attitude of those manufacturers is sound, though I wish they could have expressed their virtue a little less snobbishly. There was something about their manifesto that rubbed me the wrong way. Yet, as a matter of regular commercial practice, I think it is well, as I have suggested, that we can buy a packet of stationery without having at the same time to purchase a hat-pin ; that we can treat ourselves to a piano without having a yard-broom foisted upon us ; and that we can bring away our new suit of clothes from the tailor’s without having a tin of Skippers (“bristling” though they be “with good points”) hidden within its folds. But cigarette pictures ? No ! It may be illogical ; but I am prepared to defend them to the last ditch.

To begin with, cigarette pictures bring education within the reach of the most modest intellect. Until they were invented—who, by

the way, did invent them, and to what magical flash of inspiration do we owe them?—I knew nothing beyond a few such scraps of information as that two and two make four and that London stands upon the Thames. My brain was what might be called a “non-conductor” of knowledge, and all the combined efforts of my teachers, school primers, and the *Encyclopædia Britannica* never availed to make it anything else. It is true that I could always “get up” any special subject at short notice. But, though I have in my time, with a brave show of authority, reviewed books for innocent editors on medicine, biology, archæology, astronomy, political economy, history, theology, and all the rest of it, I have never been able to retain the merest smattering of the world’s accumulated wisdom that has thus been brought free of charge (and carriage paid) to my doors. But, since the introduction of cigarette pictures, I have “come on wonderfully,” as Headmasters tell fond parents about their boys. On the Classical side of my education I have learned to recognise the various College arms of the major Universities. On the Modern side, I have been taught to distinguish the

different “ makes ” of motor-cars. In History, I have come to know, not indeed such worthless facts as the dates of kings and queens and battles, but something of what the best historians now recognise to be more vital—namely, the social life and customs of the people themselves, as revealed, for example, in the “ Street Cries of London.” In Physical Geography, I have become conversant with the habits of water-spouts and other ingenious phenomena of Nature, and, in Horticulture, with the behaviour of straight-rooted Pea and Bean Seedlings, and the like ; while, in what I may call Applied Science, I have absorbed much data that will be of inestimable value to me when I take (as I am always on the point of taking) to Poultry Farming or Bee-keeping. If I am asked why cigarette pictures have thus made a man of me, while all conventional instruments of education have failed, I can only hazard the suggestion that it is because their method is less dogmatic and more subtle and insinuating. They do not hurl facts in massed formation upon the castle of one’s mind, provoking it instinctively into active resistance. They cause units of knowledge to creep shyly and stealthily in, by

unsuspected subterranean passages ; so that before the brain is conscious of any attack, lo ! a new fact is in occupation of the citadel.

By the manner in which cigarette pictures thus captivate the mind (in the double sense of the word “ captivate ”), they are in keeping with the most approved modern methods of education, which were not known when we were children. If they had been, I for one might be less ignorant than I am. In thinking of cigarette pictures, indeed, I am reminded of something that I saw recently at a certain “ progressive ” school. At this school there is a “ card encyclopædia ”—otherwise known as the “ visual interpreter ”—which consists of fifteen thousand pictures, with accompanying letter-press, gathered at various times from newspapers, books, and other sources, and pasted each on its separate piece of cardboard. The encyclopædia, to which additions are constantly being made by the boys themselves, is housed in a cabinet of forty-eight drawers, and there is a comprehensive index that enables the scholar, within fifteen seconds’ time, to look up any subject calculated to appeal to the youthful imagination, and to find it fully illustrated. He can, for

instance, turn up " Sixteenth Century " and find portraits, historical scenes, facsimile documents, and the like, that will give him a far more vital idea of the period than any amount of textbook reading, and will at the same time kindle within him a desire for further study of the past. Among many illustrations of the literary and social development of the century, he will even find a picture of soap, as a reminder that this commodity (about whose virtue the doctors have recently been disagreeing) was introduced into England in the reign of Henry the Eighth. If, again, he look for " Leeds," he will discover, first of all, a map of England, with a fat arrow pointing him at once to the position of that city. Next, he will see a number of pictures of its principal streets and squares ; while the succeeding illustrations will show him the connection between Leeds and the sheep-farms of Australia. And not merely can he find in the card encyclopædia inexhaustible interest in geography, history, science, or Nature, but he learns from it also the real significance of words, as when, by means of a humorous picture, the difference between an " event " and an " occurrence " is demonstrated.

I submit that this “card encyclopædia” suggests an excellent use to which cigarette pictures may be put. It would be greatly to his own advantage, and that of his whole household, if every smoker of cigarettes thus gradually created a picture encyclopædia. It would take time, of course ; but it is wonderful how quickly things (especially cigarette pictures) accumulate. Supposing you smoke one packet of twenty cigarettes a day—I hope you don’t, but one must suppose something for the sake of argument—I submit (subject to correction if I am wrong)* that in ten years’ time you would have 3,650 pictures ; while after thirty years’ systematic collection you would have no less than 10,950 pictures, covering all branches of human knowledge, to bequeath in your will to the rising generation. And, think, it would have cost you not even a halfpenny a day. It would have cost you nothing. True, in ten years you would have spent £178, or in thirty years £547, in smoke—if, that is to say, you smoke one of the popular brands and prices refuse to fall. But then, you would have spent that in any case. . . Or would

* I am wrong. I have made no allowance for Leap Years.

you? May it be that, if we were honest, some of us would have to confess that we buy cigarettes as much for the pictures as for the smoke? Verily, cigarette manufacturers are shrewd. They understand human nature. They know that in few of us is the child quite dead.

And, talking of children, I am reminded of another good thing about cigarette pictures. They have established a freemasonry between ourselves and the little boys in the street. There may be churls among the smoking community who resent the frequent "Got a cigarette picture, Guv'nor?" But I do not think they are many. For myself, I like the young urchins who thus pester me, and whenever I give one of them a picture, I feel as comfortable as a boy scout must do when he has done his day's good turn. But here, I perceive, there arises a conflict of loyalties. If we are to give our cigarette pictures to the little boys in the streets, how are we to build up our encyclopædia? Which brings us to another question: is it better to acquire Knowledge, or to perform acts of Charity? But I cannot pursue that question now. You are tired. And so am I.

The Open Window

The Open Window

MOST new journals, in making their bow to the public, boast (often with little enough reason) of their “uniqueness”; but a friend has sent me a magazine which may quite legitimately plead this virtue. It is called *The Open Window*, and it claims to be the “most widely circulated journal in Maidstone Prison.” It was published by about a dozen Conscientious Objectors serving long terms of hard labour in Maidstone gaol during the latter period of the war; and only those who know prison conditions from the inside will be able fully to appreciate the ingenuity that such an enterprise represents. Since all conversation and all writing materials (except a slate and slate pencil) are denied to prisoners, the magazine had to blossom into life in defiance of all prison regulations and in spite of the ever close vigilance of a large staff of warders. But here it is before me—justifying the adage that where there is a will there is a

way, and bearing one more witness to the indomitableness of the human spirit.

How was it produced? If, dear reader, you will insist upon knowing the truth, let me be frank with you. This unconventional little journal was written, in the absence of any more dignified sort of parchment, upon toilet paper, and bound stoutly in a piece of mail-bag canvas—and I only wish that publishers would give their books so admirable a binding! As to how its contributors, each in his own separate cell, secured pen and ink, I can merely hazard guesses that would not be very intelligible to the uninitiated. But here, once again, is the accomplished thing before me, and I fancy the time may come when it will find its way into one of our big museums as a document of considerable interest and value to students of social history.

The contents include poems, short stories, essays, and humorous pieces; and though the literary quality varies considerably, the average is surprisingly good; while all the pen-and-ink sketches are excellent. Some of the contributors dwell upon prison life itself—mainly upon its passing ironies and humours; but, for the most part, they draw their inspiration from themes as

far removed as possible from the clanging of iron doors, the gruff shouts of warders, and the eternal smell of canvas. The beauties of Nature, the consolations of religion and philosophy, the joys of literature and art ; happy memories and happier hopes : these are the things upon which, through their " Open Window," the writers most constantly choose to look out.

A reading of the magazine has brought back very vividly to me my own months in prison, and reminded me of some things I would rather forget. And yet, on the whole, the recollection of those days of bondage is a singularly pleasant one—strange as such a statement may seem. Not that there is a good word to be said for the prison system itself—at any rate as it was before the introduction of recent reforms. But it was to some extent *because* the system was so barbaric that to many " C.O.'s " their time in prison shines so brightly upon the horizon of memory. And the explanation is very simple. Deprived of all ordinary physical comforts ; robbed of all conversation with our fellow men ; shut off, in a word, from all outward sources of happiness, we were thrown back upon the inward resources of the spirit. Our bodies were incarcerated ; and

so we opened the window of the soul. There were no other windows to open.

* * * * *

I used to think—long before the shadow of the stone walls actually fell across my path—that it would be worth while going to prison for a while just for the joy of coming out. And so far as the physical side of the experience went, my fancy had not exaggerated that delight. The sheer physical thrill of emerging from silence and blank walls into a world of talking men and women, of rollicking children, of wide blue skies and resplendent red motor-'buses, is one of those things which words cannot describe. I shall never forget, for instance, my impression of the first fruiterer's shop which I passed on my "discharge" from Wormwood Scrubs. With its bananas, oranges and apples gleaming in the morning sun, its riot of colour seemed almost dazzling—I was a child again, and here was Fairyland. And when I reached Euston Station—dear, familiar Euston, with its bustling crowds, its Doric arch and great be-statued hall—I felt like taking the shoes from off my feet ; for was not this the very Temple of Liberty itself ?

But I was soon to find that this rapture of freedom was merely physical, and that, upon the whole, I was somehow rather disappointed with the world to which I had returned. It was not quite so good as the world I had left. At first I tried to deceive myself that this was not so ; but disillusionment nevertheless gained upon me—until, after much puzzled seeking, I found the explanation. And, once again, the explanation (when discovered) was very obvious. In prison one was forced to embrace simplicity. It was, it is true, an exaggerated and dangerous form of simplicity—one which, endured too long, has driven many a man mad. But it *was* simplicity, and for some of us, who were suffering not for our crimes, but our beliefs, it meant, as I have said, an opening of the window of the soul—a clearing and quickening of the mind, and a more sensitive awakening to the joys of the Kingdom of Heaven. We learnt that “ plain living ” (and there could be no two opinions about its plainness !) does naturally induce “ high thinking,” and we came to realise how woefully the imagination and the spirit of man are clogged and corroded by the mad hurry and strain, the hollow pleasures and ambitions,

the false values of life that characterise our complex and artificial civilisation. I do not suggest that we passed our days in one uninterrupted round of religious rapture. Holy monks in their cloisters may do that. They certainly would not do it in an English prison. But for many of us those days of silence and simplicity did bring occasional hours of deep spiritual joy and perception. Out of the habitual gloom that enshrouded body and mind there burst, now and then, gleams of sunlight brighter than any we had known before ; and if a bad form of simplicity could thus give times of such freedom to the soul, what potentialities of happiness must a rational form of simplicity hold !

Thus we came to reason within ourselves, and thus with a changed vision we returned to the world. One day, some time after my release, I stood on Waterloo Bridge with a friend who had also been in Wormwood Scrubs. " Before I went to prison," he said, " I adored London. It was to me just a great and glorious pageant, and I loved it exactly as a schoolboy loves a ' show.' Now, though I am not blind to its panoramic appeal, I see it

not so much as a fascinating kaleidoscope as a great and complicated machine that is grinding, grinding, grinding the bodies and souls of the people who made it, but cannot now control it." And, as he spoke, I gazed down upon the moving masses of people, the scurrying motors, the long lines of trams, the palatial hotels here, the sordid warehouses there ; and in fancy I looked over West London with its empty splendour, and over all East London with its "mile on mile on mile of desolation," intersected by hundreds of dismal trains, each groaning beneath its burden of tired humanity. No ; it was no longer just a pageant. I, too, felt that I was in the grip of some horrible machine that was whirling round and round in a vicious circle, grinding, grinding, grinding youth and beauty, hope and happiness. And I knew now why I was not so contented with the world as I had been before entering prison. I had been into the silence, and had caught, dimly enough perhaps, a vision of something better. I had touched the fringe of the garment of simplicity.

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But dissatisfaction with the present may, after all, be the truest kind of optimism. Let us, then, be of good cheer. Our present civilisation is doomed ; and in that lies a great hope. Our civilisation is doomed either way. If people continue not to think, it will fall to pieces of its own rottenness. If they do awake and think, they will themselves rise up and create a new one in its stead. Civilisations and Empires perish ; but the simple hopes, the simple loves, the simple joys of life lie garnered where no material decay or disaster can reach them. “ The Kingdom of Heaven is within you.” And, though new Empires rise and fall, and still more crazy civilisations insult the light of day, the time must surely come when man, tired of groping outwards for happiness, shall turn inwards at length, and find it where it has been awaiting him all through the ages.

The Friends' Burial Ground

(Jordans : Buckinghamshire)

*HERE, when I come to die,
I fain would lie.*

Not where the men of iron rest

In some great Abbey, drest

With vaunting symbols of their nation's pride,

Would I, whate'er my claim

Might be to rank or fame,

Be laid, when death, no more to be denied,

Takes from me the bright sun,

And all my days are done.

But here, where sleep the men of quietness,

Would I, asleep, confess

The faith I have held with all my waking breath:

That Glory is but death ;

That Righteousness is alien to the sword ;

That not by might or power,

But by the spirit's flower

Of Love, the Kingdom cometh, as saith our Lord.

The Winged Child

*The Winged Child**

IT is a hundred years since, unrecognised and unlamented by the world, Shelley was drowned off Leghorn. The "facts" of his life—strangely wooden word when applied to "the Divine Poet," as Hogg loved to call him!—are so well known, and are so easily accessible in the records of Hogg himself, of Dowden, Trelawney and others, that, in reminding ourselves of some aspects of his genius, we need only recapitulate them in barest outline.

Percy Bysshe Shelley was born, "the son of a man of fortune of Sussex," at Field Place, Horsham, on August 4th, 1792. After attending a private school, he was sent to Eton, where he was very unhappy, and where he distinguished himself by his obstinate resistance to "fagging." In 1810 he went to University

* This paper originally appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* for July, 1922, on the occasion of the Centenary of Shelley's death.

College, Oxford, from which he was expelled in 1811 because of his pamphlet on *The Necessity of Atheism*. In the same year he married Harriet Westbrook in Edinburgh. In 1814 he eloped with Mary, daughter of William Godwin, whose *Political Justice*, then enjoying its wide-spread vogue, in spite of Pitt's gibe that "a three-guinea book could never do much harm amongst those who have not three shillings to spare," he had read while at Eton. With Godwin himself he had begun his intimacy in 1812. In 1816, his wife Harriet committed suicide, and he married Mary Godwin, settling with her at Marlow, where his friendship with Keats began. For the rest, the "events" of his life are confined to travel, to other notable friendships, and to the publication of his various poems.

I

Over this record we need not linger. Around Shelley's life a voluminous literature has developed, and upon his boyish union with Harriet Westbrook too many pens have exercised themselves. There are, indeed, other facts of Shelley's life that might more profitably

detain us. We might, if space permitted, dwell upon the many practical demonstrations of his warmth and gentleness of spirit ; for Shelley, of whom we read as now " making gifts of blankets to the poor lace-makers of Marlow," and now " stumbling home barefoot in mid-winter because he had given his boots to a poor woman," and now showing his sympathy even with the brute creation by " buying cray-fish in order to return them to the river," was one of the few poets who have not only written poetry, but lived it ; and it was by a very happy accident that, a few months before the centenary which we are now celebrating, the publication of the new Byron letters should have served, by common consent, to show Shelley in a still more radiant light, and to remove from his name a vile scandal that Byron himself should have refuted.

There were not in Shelley two distinct entities—the poet and the man. " My poetry," said Byron, " is one thing ; I am another. . . . My poetry is a separate faculty. The ideal has no effect on the real character." And in those words he was only confessing, with cynical candour, what is true of all too many creative

artists. But for Shelley poetry was not "a separate faculty"—a mere adornment of life, or an escape from life. It was essentially something that must transfuse and revolutionise life. The passionate conviction that men must live poetry, and by living it bring the golden age, was, indeed, the mainspring of his inspiration. And what distinguishes Shelley from other poets who have in some measure shared his belief and his aim is this ; that, while they have moralised about love and truth and brotherhood, contemplating them objectively, as it were, from a distance, he alone, with the exception of Blake, sings of these things without losing his lyrical note, as one who himself breathes their own native air. He does not write of the Ideal Republic as of some far and vague country whose peaks, towards which we may be goaded by Fear or urged by Duty, "stern Daughter of the Voice of God," are faintly visible amid the blurring mists. He is as much at home in those airy altitudes as his own skylark, winging the blue deep of heaven.

But the skylark, after all, makes its home upon the ground ; and no more than that

“ blythe spirit ” which he hailed in immortal stanzas did Shelley himself live entirely in the clouds. His genius—like that of Milton, with whom, in spite of glaring contrasts, he had much in common—had an intellectual foundation which has been too little recognised. He possessed, said Mrs. Shelley, not only “ a brilliant imagination,” but “ a logical exactness of reason ” ; and it is this factor of reason, so rare in poets, that invests his life and work with an element of tantalising mystery. For Shelley died in his thirtieth year. If, like Milton, he had lived to attain the plenitude of his power, his imagination and reason would, it is possible, have fused themselves into a harmony that would have ranked him, upon all counts, among the few master poets of the world. Inevitably, as it was, his imagination outran his intellect, despite the valiant efforts of the latter to keep pace. For, while imagination is the magic gift of the gods, reason has necessarily to develop through experience, and one in whom there is the passion for reason will, therefore, attain maturity more slowly than those in whom that passion does not reside. That is why the genius of Keats was riper at the age of twenty-

five than that of Shelley at thirty. Keats was of a simpler nature.

II

But here we must be careful to define our terms. We have said that Keats's nature was "simpler" than Shelley's; and, in the sense of being less complex and less varied in potentialities, it certainly was simpler. Yet there is a fuller and truer sense in which Shelley's nature, for all its complexity, was the simpler of the two. If we speak of simplicity in the sense in which a child is simple, and in which the simplicity of the child unlocks the Kingdom of Heaven, then Shelley was of all men the most simple. His mind was perplexingly intricate; but so is the mind of the child. The mind of a child is a seething complex in which the most diverse instincts and qualities are struggling towards cohesion and expression; but with this mental complexity there goes that spiritual simplicity which is the crown and symbol of childhood. The child looks upon life through eyes undulled by custom and tradition, and, while viewing the beauty of the natural world through the rainbow glasses of imagination, he

demands an explanation of the actions of his elders—who have strangely conspired, it seems to him, to mar the paradise that lies around them. The child will gladly accept, even though he may be curious to fathom, the natural miracles by which he is surrounded ; what he will not accept without argument are the conventions that everywhere hamper and spoil the enjoyment of those miracles. The simple heart—the childlike heart which the New Testament exalts, and which Shelley possessed—implies of necessity a mind restless, ardent, and full of deep questionings. It is only when the spiritual simplicity of childhood is lost that the mind, ceasing to be a whirlpool, gains the simplicity of a stagnant pond. Or if, as in the case of a poet, imagination does survive the years that bring “the inevitable yoke,” that imagination becomes, except for the divine few upon whom the seal of perpetual childhood is set, concentrated into a groove. Keats’s imagination, exquisitely sensitive and perfect as it was within its limits, was thus concentrated. For him Beauty was Truth ; Truth, Beauty. That was all he knew, or wished to know. But it was not all that Shelley

wished to know. He would not seek escape from life ; he would not be satisfied with some small part of life. His imagination continued, with youthful impetuosity, to flash, like a searchlight, across the whole sky of the universe, seeking to read its riddles, and endeavouring in especial to penetrate the dark clouds of human error and suffering that obscured the pure splendour of heaven. He never got used to "things as they are," and he stubbornly refused either to ignore them or to make any compromise with them. He retained, in a word, the spiritual simplicity and the burning, perplexed mind of childhood. His eager metaphysical speculations were those of childhood ; the faults of his life and of his work—faults born of rashness and haste—were those of childhood ; but, above all, his radiant genius and his abounding generosity and charm of character were those of childhood.

He was still the child in his moments of escape—when he stole away from the world of men, as from an ill-managed and quarrelsome home, and utterly lost all consciousness not only of humanity, but of himself, as he contemplated, for example, the cloud basking "in

Heaven's blue smile." He ceased to be Shelley and, falling into a childlike trance, became something elemental, like the sun or the wind or the rain. He was essentially childlike, moreover, in his love of making Nature myths, and of imbuing natural phenomena with personality :

" All he had loved, and moulded into thought,
 From shape, and line, and odour, and sweet sound,
 Lamented Adonais. Morning sought
 Her eastern watch-tower, and her hair unbound,
 Wet with the tears which should adorn the ground,
 Dimmed the æreal eyes that kindle day ;
 Afar the melancholy thunder moaned ;
 Pale Ocean in unquiet slumber lay,
 And the wild Winds flew round, sobbing in their dismay."

Yet, at other times, Shelley's descriptions assumed a scientific precision and accuracy. " The Cloud," it has been truly said, " might be lectured upon by a meteorologist." To the child, indeed, Nature presents two aspects. One day a flower may be a beautiful or fantastic fairy ; on the morrow it becomes a specimen for the microscope.

III

There are some who wish that Shelley's imagination could have strayed oftener from the unhappy haunts of men. The fact remains that, being Shelley's, it could not. He was of too sturdy a moral fibre, and too gentle-hearted, to permit himself a constant escape from the world that was to him what (to repeat our metaphor) an unhappy home is to a child. He wanted everybody to be happy ; he wanted to put things right. Sometimes he spent himself in impotent frenzy ; he stamped his feet, as it were, upon the ground, and cried, now pitifully, now angrily. At other times, beautifully and persuasively, he unfolded the essential wisdom of childhood, which, if accepted and applied, would indeed heal our wounds and wipe the tears from our eyes. He was swept by sudden storms of hope, and the time in which he lived, of course, did much to foster them. It is true that the Bastille had fallen before he was born, and that, by the time he was a youth, the excesses of the French demagogues had everywhere wrought the inevitable reaction against Liberty. But the roseate

dreams of Universal Benevolence and Perfectibility, which the Revolution had originally inspired, still lingered in the hearts of simple men, and were a consuming flame in the soul of Shelley. Yet, to the idealists of the day, the reaction presented a problem bewildering and challenging. Why had the Revolution failed? Was it, as Mary Wollstonecraft said, "for want of virtue"? What, then, was virtue? Shelley, eager, like the perplexed child that he was, to find an answer to that question, found it—or thought he found it—in Godwin's *Political Justice*.

The Revolution had failed when attempted by force: Godwin seemed to offer another way (and one more in keeping with Shelley's gentle, if fiery, spirit) by which mankind might yet win to the golden age. The author of *Political Justice* drew much, of course, from the common stock of Revolutionary ideas, in that he insisted on man's perfectibility and argued that freedom from the tyranny of kings and statesmen and priests was the first condition of human progress. He vetoed, however, all use of force. Man's voluntary actions, he asserted, had their roots in opinion; and it was, there-

fore, through Reason that salvation must come. But he diverged still further from the main stream of Revolutionary thought in that he opposed not only government by rulers, but also the organisation of the people themselves into large or small groups for common action. "Discussion, inquiry, perpetual communication, these are my favourite methods," he writes, "for the improvement of mankind; but associations, organised societies, I firmly condemn. Discussion and conversation in the best interests are excellent, as long as they are unfettered, and each man talks to his neighbour in the freedom of congenial intercourse, as he happens to meet with him in the customary haunts of men, or in the quiet and beneficent intercourse of each other's fireside." Anarchy, indeed, albeit passive anarchy, was Godwin's unique contribution to revolutionary philosophy. Some of his ideas were wise, humane, and far-sighted; but, like most anarchists, he was a little vague as to the means by which he expected his ideals to fructify. But then, Godwin was, above all things, a doctrinaire, and though in his own life he made attempts at practising universal benevolence, while at the

same time extending to others, including Shelley himself, ample opportunity for the exercise of that virtue, he was at heart more concerned with academic discussion than with the fomenting of any kind of action. We must, however, remember that he was taken very seriously by not a few of the best intellects of his own day.

IV

Amid the despair of those years of reaction, Godwin dispensed the wine of a new hope, and the wine went to Shelley's heart and head. His soul thrilled with ecstasy at this fresh promise of human perfectibility ; and his mind rejoiced in that this promise was built, as it seemed to him, upon the rock of " a logical exactness of reason." In *Political Justice* both his imagination and his immature intellect found satisfaction, and it was on the foundations of *Political Justice* that he erected the fabric of his first published poem. *Queen Mab* is simply Godwin in verse, though verse of remarkable strength and beauty to have been written by a boy of eighteen. *The Revolt of Islam*, with its noble Spenserian stanzas, was a more ambitious

attempt at presenting the gospel according to Godwin. Godwin still supplies the theme ; but now, as Mr. Brailsford says,* “ the variations are more important and more beautiful than the theme.” Shelley continues to follow Godwin with a devotion that must have been very flattering, if a little disconcerting, to the sage. But subtler forces are awakening in the poet, and, moreover, his irrepressible imagination repeatedly asserts itself and demands a speedy and a magic victory. The two children of his poem, Laon and Cythna, setting out on their expedition to bring freedom to their fellow-countrymen, have only to name the name of Liberty in a ship at sea for all the surrounding coasts to echo it ; and the zeal and the hope of the child, who expects the hearts of men to take instant fire from the torch which he carries, constantly glows into lyrical rapture upon Shelley’s page :

“ It shall be thus no more ! Too long, too long,
 Sons of the glorious dead, have ye lain bound
 In darkness and in ruin !—Hope is strong,
 Justice and Truth their wingèd child have found—
 Awake ! arise ! until the mighty sound

* *Shelley, Godwin, and their Circle.* By H. N. Brailsford: (Williams and Norgate.)

Of your career will scatter in its gust
The thrones of the oppressor, and the ground
Hide the last altar's unregarded dust,
Whose Idol has betrayed your impious trust !

“ It must be so—I will arise and waken
The multitude, and, like a sulphurous hill,
Which on a sudden from its snows has shaken
The swoon of ages, it shall burst and fill
The world with cleansing fire : it must, it will—
It may not be restrained . . . ”

Of *Prometheus Unbound*, a scoffing reviewer asked “ Who *would* bind it ? ” and, like the majority of Shelley's poems, it enjoyed no success in his own lifetime. With its classical mythology, its spirits, echoes, fauns, and furies, its choruses and semi-choruses, it was the poet's third dramatisation of perfectibility. But if all Godwin's principles of passive anarchy and of progress through reason are present in its pages, they are present only in the sense in which the acorn may be said to be present in the living oak. Prometheus, whose destiny it is to be “ the saviour and the strength of suffering man,” and by his patient agony to redeem the race from the thralldom of Jupiter, the omnipotent Evil One, embodies all the

characteristic virtues of *Political Justice*, but he towers above the Godwinian stature like the Titan that he is. It is true that he uses Knowledge in order to free mankind ; but to Wisdom are now added the equally essential moral qualities of Gentleness, Virtue, and Endurance. Shelley's imagination and his intellect were coming more fully into their own ; he had begun to realise that his own selfless, innocent nature was not shared by all mankind, and that more than freedom from rulers and a vague dissemination of reason were necessary for the unravelling of a social chaos that merely reflected the tangled skein of human personality :

“ The good want power, but to weep bitter tears.
 The powerful goodness want ; worse need for them.
 The wise want love, and those who love want wisdom ;
 Many are strong and rich, and would be just,
 But live among their suffering fellow-kind
 As if none felt ; they know not what they do.”

v

Shelley was an “ atheist ” ; and yet, for that of an “ atheist ” poet, his portrait of Prometheus chained to his crag, enduring without

resistance all the tortures heaped upon him by the Furies, bears in certain of its lines (however imperfectly) a strange likeness to that of Jesus Christ. Moreover, it is significant that, in the pages of *Prometheus*, we should be bidden to gaze upon the Christ Himself,

“ Who made His agony
The barrier to our else all-conquering foe.”

The poet, indeed, as he looks upon that

“ Woeful sight, a youth
With patient looks, nailed to a crucifix,”

grows lyrical with love and admiration :

“ We feel, we see
Those eyes which burn through smiles that fade in tears,
Like stars half-quenched in mists of silver dew,
Belovèd and most beautiful.”

The character of Jupiter assumes, beneath the poet's swift brush, a cross-resemblance to the Satan of the old orthodoxy and to Jehovah ; and from the pages of *Prometheus Unbound* we are able very clearly to diagnose the precise nature of Shelley's “ atheism.” “ Your God,” John Wesley is alleged to have said to a famous Calvinist, “ is my Devil ” ; and that in effect was the gage which, with all the emphasis of his

subtler and more sensitive spirit, Shelley hurled at the feet of the established religion of his day. He had himself been reared in a home of narrow conventionalism, while Godwin, for so many years his master, had in his early years been subjected to all the torturing superstitions of an ultra-Calvinism. "God" for Shelley was the Awful Judge, before Whom men quailed with servile fear; He was the Omnipotent Ruler—Who must be, if the sufferings of humanity afforded any evidence, an Evil Ruler; He was the tyrannical Lord of Hosts, goading on His chosen tribe to deeds of vengeance and slaughter. To Jesus Christ, the lowly Galilean, Who, though a rebel, was of love and gentleness all compact, and Who, by self-sacrifice to the point of unresisted death, set an example to all who would make mercy triumph over oppression, Shelley was, as we have seen, warmly attracted. So strongly, indeed, was Shelley drawn to the character of Christ, and with such horror did he recoil from the Deity Who was the object of conventional worship, that, as his prose notes show, he could only regard Jesus Christ and Almighty God as being fundamentally antithetical. In part, his con-

ception was, of course, imperfect and muddled ; but in part he was merely anticipating, as he anticipated so much else, the lines upon which the advanced theology of our own day is running. This much at least is clear, that, if " Christianity " implies primarily a loyalty to dogma and superstition and established authority, then Shelley was the blasphemer that his contemporaries took him to be. But if, on the other hand, it means the practice of love and mercy, if it involves a spiritual kinship with the simple-hearted Christ Who set a child in the midst of the wise men, then Shelley was only an " atheist " in that he was more Christian than the Christians. There is, indeed, in English poetry, no sustained flight of lyrical ecstasy more implicitly Christian in this latter sense than the Fourth Act of *Prometheus Unbound*, in which all the spirits of the Universe unite in celebrating the triumph of the Titan, who by opposing Omnipotent Evil with " long-suffering love " has made " the earth one brotherhood." And Christianity could hardly hold before us a more ideal vision than is contained in the long closing passage of Act III, of which we can quote but a portion

“ Thrones were kingless, and men walked
 One with the other even as spirits do.
 None fawned, none trampled ; hate, disdain, or fear,
 Self-love or self-contempt, on human brows
 No more inscribed, as o’er the gates of hell,
 ‘ All hope abandon ye who enter here ’ ;
 None frowned, none trembled, none with eager fear
 Gazed on another’s eye of cold command,
 Until the subject of a tyrant’s will
 Became, worse fate, the object of his own,
 Which spurned him, like an outspent horse, to death.
 None wrought his lips in truth-entangling lines
 Which smiled the lie his tongue disdained to speak ;
 None, with firm sneer, trod out in his own heart
 The sparks of love and hope till there remained
 Those bitter ashes, a soul self-consumed,
 And the wretch crept a vampire among men,
 Infecting all with his own hideous ill ;
 None talked that common, false, cold, hollow talk
 Which makes the heart deny the *yes* it breathes,
 Yet question that unmeant hypocrisy
 With such a self-mistrust as has no name.
 And women, too, frank, beautiful, and kind
 As the free heaven that rains fresh light and dew
 On the wide earth, passed ; gentle radiant forms,
 From custom’s evil taint exempt and pure ;
 Speaking the wisdom once they could not think,
 Looking emotions once they feared to feel,
 And changed to all which once they dared not be,
 Yet being now, made earth like heaven . . . ”

Unattainable perfection ? Perhaps. Yet the
 vision is not that of an idle dreamer, seeking

through his dreams an escape from life. It is essentially a well-balanced vision, in that it points very clearly the direction at least in which society, as it becomes ever more closely knit and interdependent, must progress, if it is not to perish. Ecstatic idealist as Shelley was, his idealism always had its roots in reason. He never failed to realise that

“Revenge and Wrong bring forth their kind,
The foul cubs like their parents are”;

and increasingly the world will be forced to see that an idealism that has its foundations upon that solid rock of principle is not merely idealism, but the only policy that, in the long run, is “practical.”

VI

Hellas, Shelley's last important work, and his fourth attempt at describing an ideal world, is, to repeat a word we have already used, his most “tantalising” poem. His abstract faith in Love and Liberty receives, once more, rapturous expression; but, while we are intoxicated by its breathless and unearthly

music, we have to admit that, though the precise significance of the drama was probably clear enough to the poet himself, it somehow eludes us. Even in that last matchless chorus, the mood changes abruptly from the majestic full-organ tones of

“ The world’s great age begins anew,
The golden years return,”

to the almost despairing strains of

“ The world is weary of the past,
Oh, might it die or rest at last.”

And, having read and re-read this wonderful poem, we are not sure whether Shelley still looked for the consummation of his hopes in an early or distant social revolution, or whether it was only in the human mind that he now expected the true Republic to establish itself. Clearly, his genius was in a transitional stage. The influence of Godwin was waning, and other influences—notably that of Plato—were taking its place, but had not yet entered fully into solution with the poet’s own temperament. Despite the vagueness of *Hellas*, we feel that Shelley’s thought was becoming a fitter partner

for his imagination. Would his maturing mind have robbed his spirit of any of its childlike simplicity? Or would it have enabled him, in immortal poetry, to give the childlike spirit its logical, intellectual justification? We can only speculate as to what Shelley might have become. We may well rejoice to remember what he was.

VII

It is easy to catch something of his own lyrical enthusiasm in contemplating this "pard-like spirit, beautiful and swift," and to fall unwittingly into excessive adulation. And yet, when the worst that is now possible has been said, he remains for us—alike by virtue of his life, his personality, and his work—a shining and a singing angel. No poet has exemplified in his own conduct more of the virtues that he praised. No poet impresses us more fully with his personal charm than the Shelley of the "flushed, feminine, artless face"; the "eyes like a deer's, bright but rather wild"; the "white throat unfettered"; the "slender" but "almost perfect shape." And no poet has

sung with diviner spontaneity than the author of *Adonais* and the Odes to "The West Wind" and "The Cloud." If we have said little about his shorter and more purely lyrical pieces, and, concentrating rather on his more ambitious utterances, have sought to remind ourselves that the poet of *The Skylark* was also a prophet, it is because it is of him in that aspect that we most naturally think at this time. In the sight of his own contemporaries he was mad, and even thirty-four years ago Matthew Arnold proclaimed that he was not quite sane. We might quibble by admitting that he was not quite sane—and by adding that no man is. But such quibbling is needless. Time is vindicating Shelley's essential sanity. Already, during the century that has passed since he died, something of what his eager vision foresaw has come to pass. Kings have been deposed, until but a few constitutional figure-heads remain; women have at least set their feet upon the threshold of liberty and equality; labour has made important strides towards taking its due place in the commonwealth; theology and education, insisting less upon dogma and repressive "cramming," are turning

to new and humaner ethical and social ideals ; and, if we have not yet rid ourselves of war, at least there is a growing realisation of the fact that we shall soon have to choose between ridding ourselves of it or of committing racial suicide. To the childlike Shelley, who could never grow accustomed to the things that most men take for granted—war, oppression, cruelty, poverty, injustice—were revealed the things that were hidden from the wise and the prudent.

It is true that we have still a long way to go before we reach the perfect Republic. It may be, as we have said, that we shall never quite reach it. Perhaps, after all, our Utopias are of less value in themselves than as an inspiration and a signpost for such progress as may be practicable. Certain at least it is that without such inspiration little advance would be made. Shelley sang of Utopia as one who himself belonged to it. Though he died a hundred years ago, he belongs rather to the future than to the past. He is the “wingèd child” of Truth and Justice, of Love and Liberty, and with his deathless song he not only charms and fortifies and encourages us, but points

not a little of the way by which we must travel :

“ Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance,
 These are the seals of that most firm assurance
 Which bars the pit over Destruction’s strength . . .

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite ;
 To forgive wrong, darker than death or night ;
 To defy Powers, which seems omnipotent ;
 To love, and bear ; to hope till Hope creates
 From its own wreck the thing it contemplates ;
 Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent ;
 This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
 Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free ;
 This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.”

Tennyson and the Georgians

Tennyson and the Georgians

I

IT is a commonplace of literary history that, at some period before or after his death, the reputation of any author who has attained great distinction suffers—so far, at any rate, as the critics are concerned—an almost complete eclipse. Then, sooner or later, the eclipse passes, and the reputation shines forth again, not perhaps with the old lustre, but with a more certain, if less brilliant, light. Few poets have ever enjoyed greater popularity in their own time than did Tennyson. He represented to the men and women of his day the perfect embodiment, not only of their own literary taste, but of their perplexities and hopes and aspirations ; and so surely was he enthroned in public esteem—nay, in public adoration—that, as Mr. Edmund Gosse has said, he kept English poetry stable through three generations. His fame was still undimmed when, in

1892, he crossed the bar ; but it was inevitable that the reaction from so long and undisputed a sovereignty should come, and that, when it came, it should be ruthlessly searching and severe.

It is probable that, by the general public, Tennyson has remained since his death, and is to-day, the most widely read of all the English poets. But in more self-consciously " literary " circles, revolt against him set in very soon after he was buried, with due pomp and circumstance, in Westminster Abbey ; and that revolt has continued until our own day. Tennyson, the literary journals and clubs have been proclaiming, is dead ; " nobody," we have constantly been told, " reads him now." There are signs, however, that the reaction has at last run its course ; and, though it would be idle to expect that Tennyson can ever again be the " giant " that he appeared in the eyes of his contemporaries, it is clear that he is being restored to a modified—and a more discriminating—degree of critical favour. It is significant that a writer like Mr. Squire, who was not many years ago in the vanguard of the rebels, should now be doing much to revive the faded

laurels of the Victorian laureate ; and it is still more significant that, within a single week, there recently appeared two full-dress biographical studies of Tennyson,* which, while they are both trenchantly critical and both enlivened with something of Mr. Lytton Strachey's brilliant irony, are nevertheless mainly concerned with redeeming the fame of the poet of *In Memoriam* from the worst excesses of modern depreciation.

If we are to understand the nature of the revolt against Tennyson, and the causes that have led to a qualified re-establishment of his reputation, we must glance, if necessarily briefly, at the course of English poetry during the thirty years that have elapsed since his death. Reaction against the long constraint of Tennyson's influence came at first in two forms. Rudyard Kipling burst upon the stage with a clatter of triangle and drum ; and, until the Boer War and its sequel rang down the curtain upon the noisy Imperialism which he repre-

* *Tennyson : Some Aspects of His Life, Character and Work.* By Harold Nicholson. Constable and Co. 12s. 6d. net.

Tennyson : A Modern Portrait. By Hugh l'Anson Fausset. Selwyn and Blount. 8s. 6d.

sented, he captivated the public ear by the violent measures in which he celebrated the gospel of Might. Well, Kipling, the poet of occasional gentler moods, will live; but Kipling, the poet of barbaric Force, has already ceased to count, and we need not, therefore, concern ourselves with him. Nor need we make more than passing mention of the "decadents," for whom poetry became merely a mirror in a stuffy and heavily scented drawing-room, before which, to their own admiration and that of their friends, they paraded themselves in various "æsthetic" and erotic poses. The fame of the "decadents" never extended far beyond the bounds of the literary coteries; and Ernest Dowson wrote a fitting epitaph for himself, and for the whole school of which he was the chief ornament, when he said:

" Vain things alone
Have driven our perverse and aimless band."

II

The most deliberate, the most characteristic, and the most destructive force which has been directed against the Tennyson "legend" has

undoubtedly been the more recent "Georgian" movement in poetry. This movement began, roughly speaking, with the opening in 1911 of the Poetry Bookshop in Bloomsbury, from which have been issued the periodical volumes of "Georgian Poetry," edited by Mr. Edward Marsh. The Georgian movement has had no actual organisation, and many poets have sailed under its banner who have only partially shared its aims. None the less, the movement has been a clearly defined one, and, since it obviously sprang out of a reaction against all that Tennyson stood for in the popular imagination, we shall best understand the ideals of the Georgians if, first of all, we appreciate the precise nature of their indictment against Tennyson. Here the two recent monographs on Tennyson, already referred to, may help us. For both Mr. Nicholson and Mr. Fausset, while they represent a Georgian anger against Tennyson that has already begun to cool down into a reasoned half-appreciation, do none the less reveal to us, with singular unanimity of judgment, the qualities in Tennyson's personality and genius that have inflamed the younger generation into revolt.

Tennyson, then, is represented to us as having been the victim of a lifelong conflict, in the words of Mr. Nicholson, "between the remarkable depth and originality of his poetical temperament and the timidity of his practical intelligence." He was capable of deep emotion, but he lacked intellectual force or subtlety or independence. He was fertile in fancy, but deficient in true imagination. He was at heart fearful and doubting, almost to the point of melancholy ; but, from the time when he met in the society of the Cambridge "Apostles," who took themselves very solemnly and apportioned to each of their number the particular life-task which he seemed destined to fulfil, it was impressed upon Tennyson that he was born for "a great seer, whose function it was to mould the mind of his generation." And when, after characteristic deliberation—he was engaged intermittently for thirteen years—the poet married, "the wistful lady who became his wife was able, with little worsted strands, to bind what was most wild in him and most original, and by the persistent creation around him of an atmosphere of reverent admiration, to build up, even for the Laureate himself, the

legend of an infallible and prophetic thinker, the legend of a great ethical force."

So fierce has been the wrath of the modern critics at Tennyson's claim to be a prophet and an oracle that they have for a time been blind even to the merits of his purely lyrical poetry. Now, however, they admit him to have been a great singer ; but they still deny that he was anything else. He was, we are told, a man of a lonely, brooding and uncertain temperament. When he was content to yield to wayward fancy, or when (as in the earlier written sections of *In Memoriam*) he was moved by genuine personal emotion, he could write poems of matchless form and melody, such as the songs from *The Princess*, or *Ulysses*, or *Crossing the Bar*. But when he sought to be more than the cloistered dreamer, singing sweet songs through which there pulsed the ache of his own sensitive and shrinking spirit, he essayed tasks that were beyond his powers, or were at any rate beyond the reach of such discipline as he was prepared to impose upon himself. For Tennyson, in spite of his theoretical insistence upon the virtue of discipline, was, in all things except his artistry, essentially undisciplined ; and it

would have been better for him, both as poet and man, if the buffetings of fate had broken oftener into the serene and sheltered garden of his experience. If his life had been less easy, or if he had submitted himself to a more rigorous self-discipline, his emotion might have developed into vital human sympathy, and his fancy might have attained to the full stature of imagination. As it was, his human sympathy, so far as it ranged beyond his own immediate circle, was affected rather than spontaneous. Obsessed with the importance of his "mission" and his "message," he assumed qualities of human sympathy that he did not actually command, and which his habit of life did nothing to foster. The peasants, for instance, of his English Idylls do not possess real flesh and blood. They are sentimentalised. We are seldom made to feel that Tennyson, with penetrating imaginative sympathy, had entered into their lives and thoughts; nor does he enable us to share them. We view his characters from the outside; rarely, as we see Browning's men and women, from the inside.

Tennyson's lack of broad and rich-blooded

human sympathy is demonstrated, again, by his attitude towards democracy. It is characteristic of his generously impulsive emotion that, when the first Reform Bill was passed, he helped to ring the Lincolnshire church bells in honour of it ; but it is equally characteristic of his innate caution and "timidity" that the least sign of political disturbance, such as Chartism, should have driven him to panic :

"Slowly comes a hungry people, like a lion creeping
nigher."

Emotionally, Tennyson was a Liberal ; intellectually, he was a reactionary. Like the upper and middle classes of his day, whom he so faithfully represented, and by whom he was canonised, he wanted to enjoy Liberal sentiments without having to pay the price of Liberal measures. And so he fell back upon a compromise, and found comfort in the formula of "Progress,"

"broadening down
From precedent to precedent."

Nor, perhaps, is it an altogether unworthy formula. But did Tennyson cling to it, with real intellectual integrity, as anything more

than a pleasing formula ? At any rate, he was in no hurry ; it was enough for him that brotherhood should come in the distant future :

“ Is the goal so far away ?
Far, how far, no tongue can say.
Let us dream our day to-day.”

We feel that the dream was more acceptable to him than the substance of it, had it been immediately obtainable, would have been. “ Change must needs come,” Tennyson once wrote to Queen Victoria, “ but I wish that statesmen would oftener remember the saying of Bacon : ‘ Mere innovations should imitate the work of time, which innovateth slowly but surely.’ ” “ These,” says Mr. Fausset, “ are true words, but they were welcome, we suspect, to the Queen and her Laureate not so much because they were true as because they were comfortable.”

Comfort, indeed, meant very much to Tennyson, and, as his recent biographers affirm, it was his desire for mental and spiritual contentment that led him, in his attitude towards the religious problem, the women’s question, and all the other issues of his time, to accept a complacent compromise. He was, we are told

repeatedly, and he always remained, a man of fear and doubt. But he lacked the intellectual courage to look his doubts squarely in the face. If he had boldly confronted them, the temple of his faith might have been destroyed ; but it might have been rebuilt upon a more solid and permanent basis. As it was, he clutched fearfully at any straws of comfort ; and the more he did this, the more was he acclaimed by a generation that was content to do the same thing. And the more he was acclaimed, the more did he come to think himself a prophet and an oracle, and the more was Tennyson, the singer of sweet songs and the poet of Nature, crushed by Tennyson, the bard of public causes and occasions. But it is the former Tennyson that will live. If we are to see the essential Tennyson, Mr. Nicholson tells us, we must “ forget the delicate Laureate of a cautious age ; the shallow thought, the vacant compromise ; the honeyed idyll, the complacent ode ” ; we must forget “ the dull monochrome of his middle years, forget the magnolia and the roses, the indolent Augusts of his island home ; forget the laurels and the rhododendrons.” We must remember “ only

the low booming of the North Sea upon the dunes ; the grey clouds lowering upon the wold ; the moan of the night wind upon the fen ; the far glimmer of marsh pools through the reeds ; the cold, the half light and the gloom."

III

Such is the contemporary estimate of Tennyson. It may not be the ultimate view of posterity ; but it is unquestionably the view sincerely held by the younger poets and critics of to-day. But it is only fair to Tennyson to say that the revolt against him has been even more, if we may so put it, a revolt against the fawning ineffectuality of his followers. Whatever may be said for Tennyson himself, it cannot be disputed that his influence—against which for sixty years there was no real rebellion—was debilitating in the extreme. Tennyson's characteristic faults and weaknesses became more and more accentuated in the feeble hands of his imitators, until the air was langorous with faint echoes, against which it was only natural and healthy that sterner voices should be raised. If only they had been raised earlier,

Tennyson himself might have suffered less severely for the poetical sins of those who, lacking his artistry, had more than their share of his intellectual limitations.

So complete has been the revolt of the Georgians against Tennyson that it has tended to take the form of a revolt against the whole idea that poetry can ever properly concern itself with social, political, or religious themes. The tendency of the Georgians has been to revive, in an austere form, the ideal of "Art for Art's sake." That mood, however, is now slowly passing; and the main charge against Tennyson is no longer that, in seeking to be a great "seer," he attempted something inherently alien to the scope of poetry, but merely that he attempted what was foreign to his own particular character and genius. He was essentially a lyrical poet, and, when he was most natural, his songs had a wild and rather frightened music that was all his own and is unsurpassed in English literature. But as soon as he assumed the robes of the prophet, there inevitably crept into his work a fundamental insincerity. That he was not consciously insincere does not lessen his guilt. It is the

very pivot of the case for the prosecution that he was so susceptible to complacent self-deception.

Sincerity was the distinguishing characteristic of the new Georgian movement, which began as a spontaneous co-operative effort on the part of a few really kindred spirits who rebelled, consciously or subconsciously, against the long tyranny of the Tennysonian tradition. "The Victorians in general—and Tennyson and his followers in particular," said the early Georgians in effect, "were too facile—facile in their emotions and their faith as well as in their writing itself. They sacrificed everything to euphuism." Against the "glibness" of Tennyson and his contemporaries, therefore, the Georgians began to oppose a standard of austerity and restraint. They would not pour out fluent rhetoric in praise of a faith they did not really hold; they would not fervently protest enthusiasms they did not actually feel; nor would they lose their hearts to a pretty line. They would write only about what did genuinely interest and move them, and the only things that did really move the first few Georgians were the homely delights of earth

and fireside. Tennyson might concern himself with the soul and its destiny, and seek to justify the ways of God to man; but the Georgians were content to watch the cat drinking its milk upon the hearth. Nature was to be their favourite theme. But, even in the treatment of Nature, there was to be the same reserve, the same cautiousness. Nature was not to be "interpreted" to mean what for the Georgians she did not truly mean. Her external aspects, rather than any supposed inner significance, was the one legitimate theme for their Muse. Even Nature's external aspects were to be celebrated in carefully wrought and modulated cadences, and precise accuracy of observation was to replace the loose, generalised rhapsodies on "birds" and "flowers" and "hills" which characterised the work, not indeed of Tennyson himself, but of many of his disciples.

IV

Such was the excellent spirit that inspired the new movement. It might be regretted that the early Georgians had a vision bounded by the external aspect of things. But at least

they were honest, at a moment when a new standard of honesty was much needed ; and, moreover, evidence enough may be found in the volumes of " Georgian Poetry " themselves, and in the innumerable anthologies of modern verse that occupy the booksellers' shelves, that this new school of writers has produced, amid much very questionable " poetry," many lyrics of rare and original beauty. Unfortunately, however, like many other movements that have started well, the Georgian movement was soon to fall from grace ; and if we examine why it has thus so fallen we shall understand the causes that have inspired a reaction to-day in favour of a warm, if restricted, appreciation of Tennyson.

New-comers, then, were added to the Georgian ranks who were not only poets, but able literary journalists, and these journalists began to proclaim to the world—in effect, if not always in so many words—that the Georgian movement was not only *a* movement, but *the* movement. Increasingly the literary press came under the control of the Georgians and was used by them for the mutual admiration of one another's work and for the condemnation

or boycotting of the work of other poets—such as Mr. Alfred Noyes—who refused to prostrate themselves before the new image that had been set up. The inevitable result was that many young poets, for fear of being left out in the cold, feigned an allegiance to the Georgian ideals that was not spontaneous ; for there are always poets, as there are always politicians and men in every other walk of life, who have not the courage to go their own way, if it threatens to be a lonely way. They must at all costs be “ in the movement.”

Thus the Georgian movement, which arose out of protest against insincerity, bred all too quickly an insincerity of its own. It has, moreover, reduced the prevailing note of English poetry to a minor note. There is no question about the beauty of the best poetry of the Georgians ; they have, as we have said, enriched the language with many lyrics of new and individual charm. It is difficult to imagine the reader who could fail to draw pleasure from Mr. Squire’s “ Rivers,” or Mr. Robert Graves’ “ Star-Talk,” or Mr. Edward Shanks’ “ Night-Piece,” or Mr. Francis Brett-Young’s “ The Leaning Elm.” But warm admiration for these

typical flowers of the Georgian garden cannot blind us to the fact that they belong to a minor order of poetry ; nor could such admiration silence for long the protest that is already being widely made against the excessive claims that have quite commonly been made for such work. There is room in the world for trim gardens with their carefully cultivated plants ; but the soul of man cannot find permanent satisfaction in them. Sooner or later the cloistered pleasure must fall ; sooner or later we must find ourselves standing again upon the rugged hills, gazing into the star-sown heavens, seeking, however vainly, to read the riddle of the Universe, or else plunging into the vortex of the city, striving, however inadequately, to interpret the ways of God to man, and of man to his brother man. And poetry, sooner or later, was sure to escape from the graceful but narrow confines within which the Georgians had temporarily enclosed it. It must return—as there are signs that it is beginning to return—to the big themes and find its inspiration once more, not in æsthetic contemplation, but in the passions and aspirations of the individual and the communal soul. Passion—the passion

of love, the passion of endeavour, the passion for truth, the passion for liberty—has, admittedly, been too often glibly treated. It was too often glibly treated by Tennyson, and still more often by his imitators. That does not alter the fact, however, that it is only in such passion, and in the interpretation of it, that the greatest poetry can find its source.

v

But let us at least be grateful for what the early Georgian movement accomplished. It did undoubtedly demonstrate how facile and shallow much preceding verse had been ; it did set, within the narrow compass of its own vision, a new standard of sincerity ; it did stem the torrent of complacent rhetoric which Tennyson's influence had set flowing. And when poetry returns to the big themes—as return to them it must if it is to remain a living force—it will be compelled to approach those themes with a more rigorous and self-critical sincerity. Thus, though comparatively little of their own work is likely to be valued very highly by posterity, the one real service that the Georgians rendered to English literature

will not be forgotten. It will be remembered that they revealed the hollowness of the pretentious Tennyson "legend" that had long held poetry in bondage, and it will, probably, be accounted unto them for righteousness that they made impossible the growth of any such legend again. A future Tennyson will have to be content to be the maker of divine songs; the singer of "the half light and the gloom." He will have to leave it to others, more disciplined than himself, or endowed with keener and subtler intellect, to be the prophets of progress and the interpreters of God to man.

The Poet

*FOR every song the poet sings
There are a hundred songs unsung,
And by the unexpressèd things
His lonely heart is wrung.*

*What joy, his friends say, must be his
To feel the fitting measures come !
He answers, “ Nay, what pain it is
To be so often dumb ! ”*

Odd Leaves

Odd Leaves

I. A CANNON BY THE CHURCH

I WAS passing the one church in a main London thoroughfare. Over the porch were the words : “ Enter, Rest, and Pray.” I was about to accept the invitation. My foot was upon the first step when I caught sight of a captured German gun.

It stood beside the porch, in the small churchyard, pointing its open mouth at the passers-by on the pavement. It bore an inscription to the effect that it had been presented by the local Borough Authorities as a memorial of “ the imperishable glory. . . .” Instantly on seeing it, moved by an irresistible instinct, I turned right about.

Just as I was coming away, two women approached. They belonged, clearly enough, to the lower-middle classes. They came from the Provinces.

One of the women read the inscription over the church porch. "Here, Maggie," she said to her companion, "let's go in here a minute."

They were about to enter the church when "Maggie" saw the gun. Immediately, gripped by the same instinct that had stayed my steps, she caught the skirt of her friend, and, pointing to the gun, said: "Good Lord! There's a nice contrast for you! A gun in the church-yard! Talk about brotherly love!"

The two women walked off down the street. And, as I followed them, I wondered how many more people would be turned away from the church during the day by that gun. . . .

"Enter, Rest, and Pray." No, my Lord Bishops, not at the cannon's mouth.

II. THE NEWSVENDOR

THERE was exciting news to be announced that evening. I forget exactly what sort of news it was that we were all awaiting with such impatience—the result, possibly, of a boxing match, or an election, or something equally important. I remember that it was raining heavily as I left business, and that, instead of going some few yards out of my way (as usual) to buy my favourite evening paper, I accepted the invitation of the hawker who stands immediately outside my office door to buy the particular journal which he regularly sells there. I dare not reveal to you, dear reader, the name of that journal. Suffice it to say that it is one which I had sworn a solemn vow never to buy. But—it was raining, and I wanted the news; and so, inwardly resolving never to do it again, I fell into sin. And here, my friends, be warned—especially you young people, whose innocence is still unsoiled. I had always heard that the first step into sin led very easily to the second, and I was now to prove it. The next evening, as I left my office,

the man who vends that execrable journal was on the watch for me.

“ Paper, sir ? ” he said, with a very appealing smile, as he held a copy towards me. And there was something in that smile that I could not resist. For one moment I felt a tussle within my conscience ; then I wavered and handed the man my penny. We exchanged also a few words about the weather. On the third evening I had no choice. The paper was handed to me as a matter of course ; and every evening since then I have had to purchase it. It is very weak-minded of me, I know ; and sometimes, in the night watches, I am tormented by calculating the amount of money that I shall put into the pocket of the proprietor of that newspaper, supposing (as seems probable) that the man who sells it to me lives another twenty years, and that I (as seems still more probable) am compelled for a similar period to grind at my office. But, somehow, I cannot say “ No ” to that man with the appealing smile.

There are many street hawkers whose attentions I have no difficulty in rejecting. But my news-seller is not of that sort. He is a quiet,

gentle man of middle age, of very refined demeanour and speech, as I discovered on the second evening when we discussed the weather. Every evening since then we have exchanged a few words ; and I often wish that we could have a real conversation. I should like to hear him expound his views, for I am sure that he has views of his own, and very superior ones to those presented daily in the newspaper which he sells—and which I, alas, buy. He possesses, I am persuaded, a delightfully dry sense of humour, and there is something in his smile that suggests an uncommonly sane and sweet philosophy of life. I should, of course, defy convention. But, after I have stood talking to my newspaper man for a few seconds, I realise that I am doing something that is not quite the correct thing. I know that if I remain chatting with him for any length of time, curious eyes will be upon me. A sense of awkwardness seizes me ; and—God forgive me—I pretend to be in a hurry, and pass on. But I think he feels that I should like to talk with him, and that the feeling brings him pleasure—as his cheery salutation never fails to bring happiness to me.

It is old-fashioned and very bad taste in these days to believe in a heaven beyond this sorry world where we shall retain our individualities and be recognisable one to another. But if indeed there be such a place beyond the stars, then I am sure we shall not be greatly pleased to meet some of the very respectable and unoffending people with whom Convention had decreed that we should be friendly while on earth. But I think we shall have altogether unexpected delight in recognising some of the folk with whom we never did more than exchange a "Good morning," and we shall perceive how much more deeply than we ever realised some of the characters whom we encountered but casually had found their way into our hearts. It will be true joy to us to meet again a postman who used to deliver our letters ; a charlady who used to do our washing ; a beggar who used to receive our alms ; or a newsvendor who used to sell us an evening paper that we did not read.

III. THE MOTHER WHO KNEW

THIS morning, in company with a motley little crowd, including, I am glad to say, several men older than myself, I was gazing into the window of a certain toyshop in Holborn (already mentioned in these pages) where the most perfect railway models are exhibited.

Suddenly I heard at my side an unmistakably feminine voice say : “ Look, John, isn’t that North-Western ‘ Precursor ’ lovely ? ”

I turned to see a woman of about forty with her son, a charming little man of some eleven or twelve years.

At first I was inclined to think that “ John’s ” mother must be airing the one scrap of engine lore which she had happened to pick up and retain. But I was mistaken. From her continued conversation with her boy—a conversation carried on without strain or affectation on either side—it became clear that she was equally quick in recognising, and apt in discussing, Great Northern “ Atlantics ” or the Great Western “ City ” class of locomotives.

Indeed she obviously knew as much about railways, and was as keenly interested in them, as “ John ” himself ; and it was one of the most delightful things I have ever experienced to hear those two, mother and son, talking about engines and rolling stock and permanent way as freely and intimately as two school chums.

How often have I seen other mothers gazing with their sons into this very window—seen those conventional mothers trying pathetically hard to simulate an interest in their boys’ enthusiasm, yet revealing at every turn a total ignorance of, and indifference to, the objects which inspired that enthusiasm !

“ And now, dear ”—so for most boys the golden moments are abruptly ended—“ if you have seen all you want to see, I think we had better be getting on.”

“ If you have seen all you want to see ! ” Believe me, dear madam, your boy does not merely want you, with condescending patience, to stand beside him while he sees “ what he wants to see.” He wants you to see also ; and not only to see, but to know the things that he knows and to love (for their own sake) the things that he loves. In a word, he wants sympathy,

the real sympathy that comes of a common enthusiasm, that includes a common knowledge and a common terminology.

“ John’s ” mother possessed the magic key of that true sympathy. Happy “ John ” to have such a mother ; happy mother, to see the love and pride shining out of “ John’s ” eyes !

I do not think that real and enduring comradeship between mother and son would be so rare as it is if only mothers in general knew as much about North-Western “ Precursors ” and Great Northern “ Atlantics ” as “ John’s ” mother did.

IV. "NORMAL TIMES"

TO-DAY I was sitting in the bowels of the earth, thinking my own thoughts—I was, to be precise, in the Central London Tube—when, our train stopping abruptly in the tunnel, a gentleman opened conversation with me ; and, after he had talked a great deal about the weather and the state of the money market (he had the financial page of his newspaper spread before him), he sighed heavily and petulantly : “ Oh, I *shall* be glad when we return to normal times.”

“ Oh,” I said, “ you want to go back to the Ice Age, do you ? ”

“ Ice Age ? ” he repeated rather snappishly. “ What on earth do you mean ? ”

“ Well,” I said, “ I admit that my own memory does not carry me back so far, but I believe that the Ice Age was a perfectly ‘ normal ’ time. But perhaps it is to the days of our esteemed ancestors, who lived in caves and huts and wore bearskins, that you allude when you speak of ‘ normal ’ times ? Or maybe you are pining for the Pax Romana, or languishing for

Bloody Mary and the fires of Smithfield ? Or possibly you are thinking of Columbus, or sighing for the jolly Cavaliers ? Or is it that your heart yearns for the days when the voice of the steam-engine was first heard in the land and the smoke began to ascend from Manchester and Birmingham ? ”

“ I suppose,” said my companion, who was dignified and serious, “ you are trying to be funny. You know very well what I mean. I want the world to get back to business—to get back to—er, normal times—that is, to things as they were before the war.”

“ Oh, do you ? ” I said. “ But tell me, my friend, in what way were the days ‘ before the war ’ more ‘ normal ’ than the days when yet there was no animal life upon the earth, or than the days of our barbarian forefathers, or than the days of King Stephen, or Cardinal Wolsey, or Ben Jonson, or Queen Anne (of holy memory), or of James Watt, or the late Lord Tennyson ? ”

“ Well, then,” said my friend, as he cast a furtive eye upon a column of figures, “ you don’t think things are going to get better—to go back a little more to what they were ? ”

“ It is possible,” I replied, “ that certain

individuals are going to have a less comfortable time than they have had for a long period ; but I trust that things are going to be better for men in general. Indeed, I even dare to hope that man will ultimately evolve a single world state in which Fellowship will truly produce 'normal' times. Meanwhile, whether the times more immediately ahead of us may be better or worse than the decades preceding the war, I know this : they will certainly be very different ; and to desire to return to 'normal times' is as futile as the child's crying for the moon. Indeed, in a very real sense, it is even more foolish. The child crying for the moon does at least cry for something that exists ; and if the scientist does not succeed in bringing the moon to the child, it is almost conceivable that he may some day enable the child to go to the moon. But to sigh for a 'return to normal times' is to sigh for what is clearly impossible. For we cannot return to that which has never been."

At this point the train started as suddenly as it had stopped, and, as our throats were unable to compete successfully with the noise of the wheels, our conversation ceased.

V. How ?

THIS morning, as I sat writing at home, a young gentleman of five called with his mother to see me. After he had made a thorough examination of the room in which I was working, and had asked me divers pertinent questions respecting the honourable profession of the pen, I suggested that we should go out into the garden.

At first all went well. My visitor ran wildly round and round the lawn, making frequent weird noises. He explained that he was the Scotch express (London and North-Eastern). But having reached Edinburgh (Waverley) without a stop, and in an incredibly short time, —he was exhausted, and for a while he was content to stare vaguely about him, occasionally expressing his appreciation of things in general terms. Then a very gaudy flower attracted and riveted his attention for some seconds.

“ Uncle, what’s this ? ”

“ That,” I said—fortunately it was labelled —“ is *Lilium Croceum*.”

“Is it? Is it really?” My young friend was thinking, I fancy, how much nicer it would be to be called “*Lilium Croceum*” than to be called plain “Jack.”

“Yes,” I replied authoritatively, “it is.” And there the incident closed—very happily. My nephew was duly impressed. He looked at me out of the corner of his eye with obvious awe and admiration. A wonderful man, this uncle! He knew everything! I began to feel very superior.

* * * * *

But later I began to have misgivings. For I knew from experience that the “What?” stage (which, with the exercise of a little ingenuity, is easy enough to negotiate) was likely to be followed by the more difficult “Why?”, and that from the “Why?” stage it is all too easy to slip off into the deep and often fatal waters of “How?”

A moment later my fears were justified. He made a bee-line (wretched boy!) for the nearest rose tree, and, pointing to the thorns, shouted, “Uncle, why are these things put on the tree?”

I replied that they were not exactly “put

on," but that they grew on the tree, and were designed for its protection. He had not the foggiest idea what "protection" meant, but it sounded rather grand in his ear. It seemed to suggest to him that at least there was an explanation of why thorns grew upon rose trees; and there for the moment he was content to leave the matter.

I had barely had time, however, to congratulate myself on having effected a lucky escape when, looking straight up into my face, my visitor asked sternly : "Uncle, *how* do the thorns grow on the trees ?"

Swish ! I was suddenly in the deep waters. Though I struggled desperately, I could not find the flimsiest straw of an explanation to save me. In the dark waters of "How ?" my reputation, like that of so many parents and uncles and aunts before me, went ignominiously down.

* * * * *

How do thorns grow on rose trees ? How indeed ?

VI. TWO KINDS OF MUSIC

I WAS recently walking with a friend, one Saturday afternoon, along a main street of a fashionable Rhineland town. All was apparently quite normal. We knew that it was only apparently so ; for, after several weeks of wandering about Germany, we had learned a little of the hardships and fears that beset a people who do not wear their hearts upon their sleeves. Germany was prosperous before the war, and the houses in the worst districts were substantially built, while the streets are kept scrupulously clean. Temperamentally, moreover, the Germans are such that they instinctively hide their poverty ; so that the distress of Germany, though one soon realises something of it when one enters the homes of the people, especially of the middle classes, is not easily visible in the open thoroughfare. That Saturday afternoon in Wiesbaden, the pavements were full of pedestrians ; the shops seemed to be fairly busy ; the roadway was brisk with traffic ; the single-deck trams, with their

trailers, ting-tingled their way along ; and over all the sun shone out of a cloudless sky.

Suddenly, however, we noticed that a strange stillness was falling upon the street, and before long all traffic had disappeared. Presently, in the distance, we heard a most horrible noise—a mixture, it might be called, of the Scotch bag-pipes with dozens of concertinas ; and very soon a large company of France's coloured troops marched down the roadway, deafening us with their blatant, barbaric native music. At a certain time each afternoon, we learnt, all traffic in the main streets was stopped for an hour or so, while the French " black " troops marched through them to parade in the market-place.

I went to bed that night with that barbaric music still echoing in my ears. I awoke at seven o'clock the next morning to hear a very different kind of music in the street. Looking out, I saw tramping by in the roadway a party of twenty boys and girls, brightly and loosely clad in green, all of them carrying haversacks, and all of them equipped with mandolins or guitars. They were marching joyfully out towards the dawn ; they were making—as is

now the custom on Sundays of the young people all over Germany—for the good green country and the hills. And, as they went, bare-throated and bare-limbed, they played together on their mandolins and guitars a soft, airy melody in which, as it seemed to me, all that is gentlest and simplest in the life of Germany—the Germany of Beethoven and Grimm—found expression. And as I listened to that ethereal little tune, and then thought of the blatant military strains that I had heard not many hours ago in that same street, I said to myself: “Here are the two kinds of music—the vulgar music of domination and the sweet, shy music of fellowship—that are contending everywhere, one against the other, for the mastery of mankind.” Which of these two kinds of music, I asked myself, is going to overcome? . . . As I stood on my high balcony and watched those children marching away into the dawn, until they were now almost lost to sight, and as their divine little melody grew fainter and failed altogether in the distance, my eyes were moist with prayer.

Waking Dreams

*THIS morning, as I woke in bed,
The Little Ouse was in my head—
The Little Ouse that flows so brown
Beside the wharf at Thetford town,
And under the grey arch where yet
The seal of ancient peace is set.
Oh, what should make that quiet stream
Wind through my happy waking dream?*

*Yesterday, as I woke in bed,
Th' Atlantic pounded through my head,
Lashed by the furious Sou'-West
That gives to sea and ships no rest,
While, like a derelict, on high
The half-moon drifted through the sky.
Oh, what should make that moon's pale gleam
Eerily haunt my waking dream?*

*The day before, I woke in bed,
And children flitted through my head.
Oh, there was Jack, with open smile,
And Anne, her small face wreathed in guile ;*

*And Derrick, of the sober eyes,
Gazed at the world with mute surprise,
Till schoolboy Tom, cheered by his team,
Shot a goal through my waking dream.*

*To-morrow, when I wake in bed,
Who knows what may be in my head?
What joy? What peace? What grief? What
fear?
Where shall I be—afar or near?
Oh, strange adventure! Hasten, Sleep!
Bear me across the unknown deep;
But bid some holy influence beam
Upon my spirit's waking dream!*

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